

Beatrice Ravnets' Ways of Deliverance

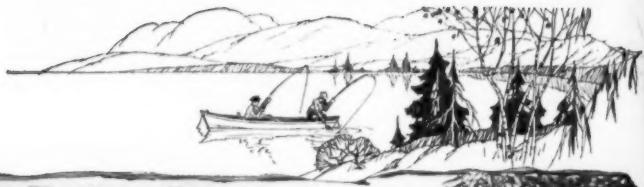
# AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

JUNE, 1923

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JUNE  
1923

# AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. LI  
No. 4

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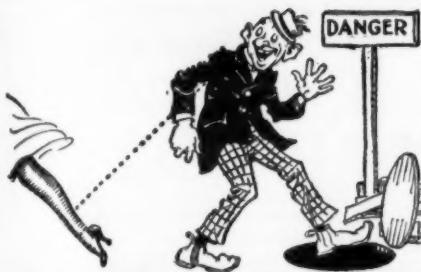
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Cut it out fellows. Don't be a cake-eater. If you ever knew the joys of a real healthy body, you would start this minute to get one. And that is just what you are going to do. The undertaker has his eye on you, but give him the laugh and say: "Not yet, old boy."

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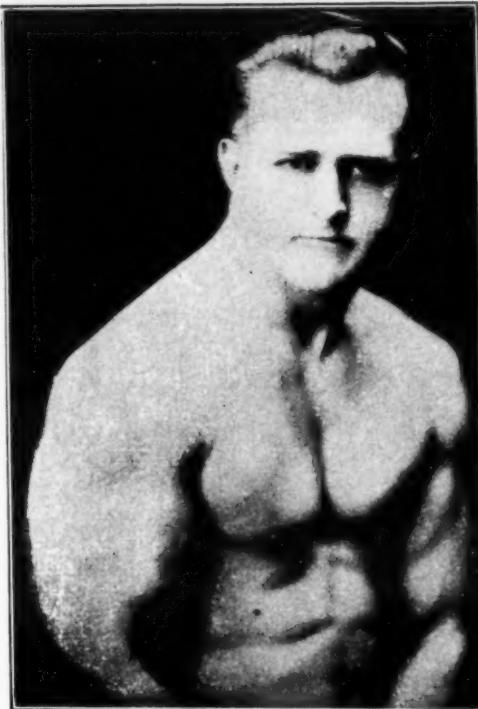
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## Ways of Deliverance

By Beatrice Ravenel

Author of "The Man Who Would Not Wait,"  
"A Transformation Scene," etc.

## CHAPTER I.

**I**F you want to build up a practice among these people," Mrs. Lever-  
son asserted decisively, "you simply have to play with them." She threw back the ermine cape of her evening coat and leaned toward the open window of the limousine. "Did you ever feel such weather? It might be June instead of October. I believe that burst of pink that shot by just now was crape myrtle, still in bloom."

Doctor Jason Waverly's handsome mouth curved, shattering his usual expression of professional detachment.

"I know a broker who tells me that his best deals are put over on the links, but I had an idea that medicine was an indoor, as well as an interior, sport."

"Well, you're going indoors," his sister responded patiently, "though, like most of these Southern functions, a great deal of it will spill into the piazza. It's going to be one of the best things of the season, as well as the earliest, so please be in evidence."

"I thought that my practice was pretty well made. As assistant to Doctor Welton——"

"That doesn't prevent your making extensions, does it? Old Welton is the only doctor here who *knows* anything, but he's—well, call it provincial. He hasn't the manner, and he has careless

habits. His paying practice comes, not from the natives, but from the fringe of rich Northern people who own places around Pangborne. Miles around. It's more of a township than a town. He doesn't know exactly how they like to be treated. That's where you come in. He has the sense to realize that people like us want our professional advisers—our doctors, lawyers, clergymen—to be of our own sort. When I suggested you for the job I delicately stressed that."

"It took delicacy," murmured her brother. "Awfully good of you, Kathleen. I see. I'm to be chemically clean, and cultivate a society bedside manner. And now will you kindly tell me a little about these hosts of ours to-night? It's Miss Hare's coming-out party, isn't it?"

"Miss Grant. Her mother was a Hare," corrected Kathleen. "You've met Cecil van Zorn."

"The precious young man I've tripped over in your drawing-room?"

Kathleen smiled.

"He does tangle round my feet, rather. Well, he's Mona Grant's cousin. His mother was a Hare, too. They live at The Poplars with Mr. Hare, who is uncle to both. Mr. Hare's two sisters married into our set, but they are both dead now; so are their husbands. He has always lived very quietly, because of his mother——"

"Stop, stop! Let me get that straight," pleaded Jason, pressing his long, effeminate-looking hand to his forehead. "Who's who? No wonder Cecil tangles."

"I'd better begin at the beginning," said Kathleen resignedly. "It's rather a peculiar crowd. Some call The Poplars the Mad Hare's House."

"I can guess who started that."

"I did *not*. I like Mona too much. She's sweet. Well, the original Hare, her grandfather, was an Englishman of what they candidly call the middle class, and, as he took no pains to conceal, not the uppermost middle either. No relation to the Cecils nor yet to the Hare-Naylors."

"Just plain rabbity Hares."

"He made a fortune in business, and doubled it several times in land. Unlike most Americans, he never tried to climb. To make his son what he considered a gentleman, he would have had to put him into the army, or into the 'American Parliament,' and he wanted him in his business. It would have surprised him, I think, to know that in essentials, Thomas Marchmont Hare is about as good as they make them."

"The present master of The Poplars?"

"Yes. His father died about ten years ago. He bought the place—the old man did—for climate and scenery, without any idea of breaking into the charmed circle. But he had two daughters who were pretty and—enterprising. They saw to it that they went to the right schools, and made the right friends. I've heard that they secured rather inferior specimens, but, anyway, one of them married a Grant and the other a Van Zorn."

"That ought to have got them in."

"Not sufficiently," she surprised him. "Cecil and Mona have had to struggle. There was a terrible handicap: the grandmother."

"Wait. I remember. One of Welton's pet cases. Senile?"

"Exactly. Not bad enough to shut up, but—unaccountable. The household revolves about her. Thomas Hare has been a devoted son, and in consequence has lived like a recluse. Kept the boy and girl at schools. One result of the lack of home life is that Cecil is pretty wild. I know it took pressure to induce Mr. Hare to allow this affair."

"Hard on the girl." There was a gentleness in Jason's voice that his sister understood. Mallory Leverson had been pretty wild, too. Though Kathleen had mourned him sincerely, she could not deny inwardly the implication of her brother's tone. Life had been far less hard since his death.

"Frightfully. She has been away too much, besides, to have any real friends here. I'm as near as any one. That's why I promised to come early, to help produce that background of dowagers of the first water. Little Mona is like the peri at the gates of paradise. Cecil arranged it. 'Food from New York, music from heaven, flowers from all over,' as he says. I do hope——"

The car stopped with a wrench and a jar that threw them back in their seats. Jason flung open the door and stepped to the ground.

"What's the matter, Sidney?" he asked. They were under the shadows of the entrance to a private road. The headlights picked out startling plasters of almost phosphorescent green on the tree trunks.

The negro chauffeur touched his cap.

"Naboth, sir," he answered, as if that explained everything. "I wouldn't 'a' run over him fer a million." He pointed to the slouching, nondescript figure that shrank between the trees, as if to force itself into the rough bark for hiding. It mumbled unintelligible abuse, and shook a stick.

Afterward it seemed to Jason that the earth-colored clothes, the face that was mostly straggly hair, the cringing menace, resembled, quite uncannily, the

gnome or troll of legend who stood at the gates of enchanted castles, warning the adventurer away. It was the portent of evil.

"He didn't make no sound, suh," Sidney extenuated.

"Neither did we, coming round that curve," retorted Jason. "Be more careful. He might have been killed." He felt in his pocket and thrust some money at the scarcely human apparition. The old man snatched it, and limped off with the same surprising swiftness that a mole uses in diving into the ground.

"And who is Naboth?" Jason asked, as he seated himself again in the car, and Sidney proceeded to negotiate the road with a sulky and exaggerated caution.

"He's a queer old countryman who owns a piece of ground with a ramshackle cabin on it, that cuts into the Hare property. It's an eyesore. And of course he won't sell. His name being really Naboth, naturally everybody calls it Naboth's Vineyard. He keeps some ugly dogs, too. The negroes stand in awe of him. Although he's white, they say he is a 'cun-juh-man,' and that once he died and came to life again."

"Well, he had a charmed life tonight," observed Jason grimly.

They had joined a line of other cars. The private road, after winding through woods, twisting like a snake, suddenly widened into an avenue of oaks which, with superb inconsistency, made a straight approach to the portico of The Poplars, now blazing with light. The house was of the traditional, columned, Colonial type but a long ell had been added stretching toward the back. Under the portico a wide terrace was overhung by a galaxy of Chinese lanterns that picked out masses of color from the flowering plants below.

Jason found himself propelled along with the gathering crowd of other men, into a smaller building which was connected with the end of the terrace by a

bridgelike gallery. There was one of these on each side of the house, and he remembered having been told that farther south they were called *garconnières*—overflow rooms for the young men of the household. This one was evidently dedicated to Cecil. Dedicated was the word. As he took off his coat Jason looked about with interest. It was luxurious in spots with gorgeous hangings and curios. Cecil's taste evidently inclined to the bizarre. Jason took a glance at the bookshelves. He expected to find Burton and Beckford and Brantôme, given a richer thrill by the neighborhood of the most modern of the psychoanalysts. He did.

Another discovery he made was that one of the three rooms had been adapted to the purposes of a miniature private bar. Cecil was sparing no trouble to make the evening a success.

As he rejoined Kathleen, and passed with her into the hall, Jason gave almost a start of admiration. The folding doors had been drawn back everywhere, leaving one immense dancing space. Old-fashioned mirrors like lakes carried the vista on. The effect was dazzling white. The paneled walls, the crystal chandeliers, whose pendants hung over enormous saucers of antique engraved glass, the white draperies, embroidered in Oriental silver which half concealed the mahogany pieces, above all, the trees of white camellias—they were trees rather than bushes—and the banked snow of white roses. It was as haughty as a New England winter landscape and as seductive as tropical moonlight. And the mirrors, like water, multiplied it infinitely. Cecil had his points, after all, thought Jason. It was wonderful! And then he saw something better, the center, the crux of it all.

He saw her, not as the wanderer in the *Snow Queen's* palace found his eye caught and led to her shining beauty as to a high light; he saw her as a man pauses to breathe more deeply before

the young May moon in its setting of pale cloud, or as he wonders at a pearl against its iridescent shell. The white beauty fell back and became subordinate to a girl with ash-blond hair, a girl in a sheath of silver tissue.

He found himself guided by Kathleen straight toward the group of which this girl formed the nucleus; found himself murmuring something; looking down into eyes of deep-sea blue. Then he was a part of the current going past her. Kathleen was introducing him right and left. He realized that he must try to create the impression of ordinary intelligence. The ordinary earth came up to meet his feet. As the first fox trot swung out from a jungle of palms he found those feet keeping step with some entirely uninteresting ones, whose owner's name he had failed to catch. It was just a ball; it wasn't cloudband. He must necessarily behave like a man of this world.

To his relief he found out, as soon as the intermission began, that his partner had friends. He wanted simply to stand against a friendly outcrop of wall and follow the gleam of a slip of fairy silver. He had no particular wish to get nearer—yet. Anyway, he couldn't. She was surrounded. He made his way toward a noticeable apricot splash of color that might be Kathleen's jade-dangled frock.

She stood on a short flight of steps—not the main stairway, but a flight that led from the back of the hall up to an arch from which a curtain had been drawn back, showing a glimpse of corridor beyond. Cecil was assiduously fanning her. Through the filaments his beautiful, ruined young face looked like a dissipated young rajah's. There was a peculiar reciprocity in the glance the two men exchanged. It was an unsympathetic type, Jason mused, but, after all, it was the goddess' kinsman.

"Why didn't you tell me she was like that?" Jason asked, in his sister's ear.

"Who? Mona? I said she was lovely."

She turned, then stood transfixed, staring past him, through the archway behind. Jason, instead of following her gaze, swung in the opposite direction and looked down upon the medley below. Tops of smooth heads, tops of waved, decorated heads, black masculine shoulders, bare feminine ones, foreshortened outlines of every color of the spectrum—a second ago they had been seething and rippling like the rapids in a river. What was the matter with them? An immobility, a silence had seized them. It was as if silence was flying as sound flies, terrified, to the edges of the room, dashing against the walls, quelling everything in its passage. The feeling that Mona had given him surged over him again; the feeling of being in a strange world, magical, abnormal—different.

He felt Cecil twist across him, heard his voice, aghast:

"My God!" Then it hissed in his ear. "Keep her quiet, keep her quiet. Play up. We may carry it off."

In the archway beside them stood a plump little lady; a little lady out of a Watteau picture, with its brocades, its white puffs and curls, its lace fan and ornaments. Over the fruity cheeks the lace-capped hair might have been a coquettish masquerade of age. Jason's trained eye took in automatically the fallacy of youth. This was one of the cases, the ironies of nature, where the body had acted as a softly padded cell for the sleeping mind, protecting it from friction and alien contacts.

Kathleen stepped forward, offering her hand. But the old lady tapped it with her fan and turned, like a diverted child, to the brilliant crowd below. Her clear, pleased voice rang like a bell.

"I do love a party. We're having such pretty weather for one, aren't we? But then I've been a widow for nearly two weeks, and that *does* rather take the joy out of life."

Cecil slipped his hand under the fat, lace-frothed elbow.

"Come into the dining room, gran-nie. Let's get some supper."

The elbow jerked away.

"No, I want to stay and talk to all these nice people." She went on conversationally: "I'm sorry my husband isn't here. He was so clever. You know these clever men always like something about, young and pretty and silly. So I generally let him." Into the awful silence she dropped archly. "It was most often a spitz poodle."

The same idea seemed to strike in different places at the same moment. Sudden fountains of conversation sprang up all over the hall. Groups dragged their eyes away, and became absorbed in each other. The large, fresh-colored, English-looking man who Jason knew to be Mr. Hare came quietly up the steps, as though this apparition had been entirely expected. His mother, with the weird clairvoyance of her kind, saw through him at once.

"Now, Tom, I'm not going. I'm going to stay." A tremor shook the firm, three-scalloped chin. She turned piteously to Jason. "I didn't mean to tell, but I really am the world, you know. I didn't want to be, but they insisted. And of course I oughtn't to live as quietly as I do, under the circumstances." Her short arms made a foolish, revolving movement. "I ought to go around more, oughtn't I?"

He bent his head gravely. He recognized the curiously reasonable way in which her clouded brain worked out its unreasonable premises.

Hare nodded to Cecil.

"Don't let the music start before I get her away. Tell—"

He was too late. From the palm brake, only a few yards away, a blare of savage sound leaped to the ceiling. Its cadenced beats shook the floor like the jungle let loose underfoot. And with the first barbaric note of the music the old lady began to scream. Her short, reiterated shrieks, always the same single

tone, seemed horribly a part of it. Hare swung his mother up in his arms. Over his shoulder he spoke to the doctor.

"Come with us, please." Then he flung a curt order to Cecil: "Go to Mona."

Kathleen had already hurried down on that errand. Following Hare and his struggling burden, Jason became aware of the closing in of two women who had been hovering distressfully in the semidarkness of the corridor. One was a powerfully built, middle-aged maid, with a pale, freckled skin and red hair showing under her cap. The other was a pleasant-faced, dark young woman about whose manner there was something familiar to him. It seemed to Jason that the procession passed down the corridor, more steps, past endless rooms, before reaching the end of the ell, where Mrs. Hare's apartments were.

It was when Jason began his ministrations that he discovered why the young woman had given him that feeling of accustomedness. She was the trained nurse who had been for some time in attendance on the old lady. She was remarkably intelligent, and it was evident that Hare placed the highest confidence in her. It was from her that he consented to receive the explanation of his mother's escapade.

They had left the patient, at last sleeping peacefully, with Honoree, the maid—who spoke, by the way, with a slightly foreign accent—on guard beside the bed. Hare had led the way into the adjoining sitting room. This formed the extremity of the ell, and looked through tall glass doors into the garden. It was furnished in the English manner, with gay chintz covers on the heavy seats, and a crowd of photographs in silver frames, and a flock of bibelots on the Victorian rosewood cabinets. Facing the glass doors was an enormous, high-backed armchair, with an exquisite little worktable by it, and a thick, embroidered velvet cushion on the

ground in front. This chair, for some reason, had no slip cover of chintz, but was upholstered in dark-blue velvet.

"We thought we had kept the news of the party from her," the nurse began. "If she had gone to sleep at her usual time—she sleeps on her good ear and nothing rouses her—but to-night she wouldn't. She often dresses, so that didn't alarm us. But when she insisted on going—well, we didn't dare to prevent her. We hadn't time to send for you, Mr. Hare. We didn't know *what* she might do."

"I should never have consented to this turmoil taking place," said Hare bitterly. "It never shall again."

"You couldn't know, Mr. Hare," said the nurse, her voice softening. Hare looked at her gratefully. She seemed an understanding person.

When Jason found himself on the terrace again he smiled sardonically. There was the defeated air of *sic transit gloria mundi* over everything. The lanterns had flickered out. The front of the house was dark, except for the hall light. The guests, of course, must have melted away as soon as decency permitted. The servant who brought him his hat and coat, and whose impassive countenance conveyed the assurance that he knew his place better than to notice anything unusual, informed him that Mrs. Leverson, having accepted a seat in a friend's car, had left her own for Doctor Waverly. She had, however, allowed the chauffeur to go, because she thought the doctor would prefer to drive himself.

The car stood in the drive. As Jason was about to step to the ground he hesitated. Another sound besides the closing of the door behind him arrested him. He walked softly toward it, around the corner of the terrace. It became unmistakable. His last steps were almost a run.

A black mesh of vines festooned the space between two columns, like a net

hung up to dry. Under it, on a cane couch, lay a heap of silver. It pulsed and shuddered with the motion of a pile of silver fish poured from a seine. But the sound that came from it was the uncontrollable sobbing of a heartbroken child. As he stopped by the couch the voice broke into words. Half articulate as they were, there was no doubt as to the misery and rebellion of their meaning.

"It's unjust—it's cruel!" Then, in a shrill cry of despair. "Why can't I have the sort of life other girls have? Why must it be spoiled like this—always? I'll never have any freedom, never have any happiness, as long as she lives! And she'll live forever. She will—she will!"

Jason laid a restraining hand on the heaving shoulder. A dim face with tightly closed eyelids lifted itself and rubbed against his sleeve in a peculiarly helpless and puppylike way. Jason gasped. The action sent extraordinary thrills through him. She wasn't a young goddess after all, then, aloof and rather frightening. She was a child with a violent sense of injury, sputtering outrageous things that she didn't mean in the slightest. He had to hold himself from comforting her like an infant. It is when goddesses lapse to the plane of naughtiness and the abandonment of celestial taboos that they become altogether irresistible.

The touch on her cheek may have conveyed these impressions through several layers of cloth. The long eyelids opened. She sat up with a spring, and held him off with shadowy, tense arms.

"I thought you were Uncle Tom," she said haughtily. A last whimper slightly spoiled the effect.

"I'm sorry," said Jason humbly. "I hoped I—might be of some use." He offered his apology for existence. "I'm a doctor." He ventured to draw the slipped scarf over her shoulders.

The girl peered at his very good-looking face through the dusk.

"Anyway, you're *young*," she decided with an adorable vixenishness. "You can understand."

"Oh, yes," he assured her earnestly. "Your—disappointment."

The taboos gave way once more. She threw out her hands.

"Oh, wasn't it awful, wasn't it awful?" Her voice grew hard. "Well, this is the end of my social career. I never can face those people again!"

Jason sat down methodically beside her. This was what he was good for, the dissipation of fogs of feminine hysteria.

"Don't say that," he persuaded. "You'll feel better in the morning. Just—"

"Just take some hot milk and get a good night's rest," the girl parodied. "You doctors! Do you know what it is to live with a human being who isn't quite a—human being? You don't. To look forward to that all your life—or all *her* life!"

"It is hard on you," said the doctor, becoming all too human. "Why couldn't you live somewhere else?"

"Uncle Tom would never feel satisfied; he wouldn't consider it respectable. A girl's place is at home, even when home is—*hell*!" As though the vehement word brought its reaction, she shrank back and spoke next in a gentle, shamed manner. "Please don't think too badly of me. Please don't. I do love my grandmother, in a way. I can remember when she was sweet. But there's no escape for me. I haven't any money of my own. And my youth will go and—everything. There's nothing to do but to submit." It was plain that her hopelessness expressed a dominant mood. She got up, drawing in the argent mist of her scarf like the rags of her young dignity. Her tone had the effect of a faint smile. "It's just your bad luck to see me like this."

"I—" began Jason. And found there were no words. Somehow, he was

pressing two soft hands, and a circuit of all devotion, all delirious self-abnegation, mixed with an inconsistent, but perfectly justified impulse to conquer, pulsed through him, so that he was afraid that she must know it. Then, in a trance, he watched her move along the terrace toward the back of the house, and disappear in the happy darkness.

## CHAPTER II.

It was during the following afternoon that a hurry call for Doctor Welton came from The Poplars, over the telephone. The instrument was working badly, but the voice sounded like the imperturbable guardian of the door. Mr. Hare, on the other hand, Jason considered, must be perturbed, not to remember that Doctor Welton had been called away the preceding morning to a distant part of the State, and was not expected back until to-morrow. Jason himself had informed him of this. After a little more gibberish Jason assured the telephone that he would drive over at once.

By daylight The Poplars looked impressive, but less mysterious. Between the oaks of the avenue glimpses of lawns and flaming flower beds intervened. The late season had mixed summer and fall blossoms in careless profusion. As Jason's car drew up at the entrance the same servant came hurrying to meet him, as if some shaft had finally managed to pierce the armor plate of his training. It turned out to be the ineradicable human instinct which urges a man to be the initial bearer of bad news.

"Mr. Hare is waiting for you, sir, in the wing," he began, in a voice like a silence cloth. "Under the circumstances, he did not wish to leave—the remains, sir."

"What?" demanded Jason. "Whose remains?"

"Mrs. Hare has passed away, sir," re-

plied Johns, with all the importance of the messenger in Greek drama, who reports the off-stage tragedy. "Her maid found her dead in her chair, soon after lunch."

"Found?" Jason repeated to himself. Hare had told him that his mother was never, even for a moment, left alone.

He went behind the messenger to the end of the ell. At the door of the bedroom Hare met him. As they shook hands, and Jason murmured the few words of sympathy that the moment demanded, he noticed that Hare seemed moved beyond the reach of expression. It was almost singular, considering the whole situation. So deep-seated an emotion appeared excessive. But you never could tell. After all, the poor, afflicted woman had been his mother. He liked Hare the better for regarding it as a death, not, as most people might have, as a Blessed Release, with capitals.

As the doctor stood by the bed, after making his first, cursory examination, it was from Honorine that he received answers in a stream, all in her French-Canadian accent, intensified by excitement. Yes, she had found madame, in her big chair in the sitting room, her head lolling against the side. *Affreuse!* Still warm. She had called madame, had shaken her. Mees Mona and Mees Allenby, the nurse, had come out of the room only a little, little while before. Death must have come at once, like that! Yes, madame's heart was not so good. And the two young ladies had gone for a drive after Mees Allenby had met her at the door of the room, and given her a direction about madame's diet. And then she had gone in to madame! She had called monsieur at once. Yes, they had moved madame to the bed. She looked so uncomfortable—like that.

"There is heart trouble in the family," Hare interposed. "When you left Miss Allenby, Honorine, you went in to your mistress immediately?"

"*Mais*"—the woman hesitated—"I

will not deceive you, monsieur. There was a book, I thought on the table in the library, which I desired to see; one that I had heard Monsieur Cecil talk of, that he had brought from the East. I had a curiosity." She added painfully: "I may have been longer than I supposed. I could not find it; I searched."

Hare's hand closed on the footboard of the old carved bed.

"'Ways of Deliverance?'" He spoke as if in spite of himself.

"That one. I saw no harm. It may have been five minutes, seven." Suddenly her large, bony hand flew out in a tragic gesture. She swooped down. "The rings—the rings of madame! They are not on her fingers! The beautiful cabochon ruby, the diamonds, madame's brooch—all gone!"

Hare's dull eyes lighted up with something like dread.

"She had not given them to any one to-day? She often does."

"They were on her this morning. And she has not lost them for a long time. This morning she lost the little silver sheath to her scissors, and cried until she was promised another."

"I bought it," said Miss Allenby's quiet voice. She had entered the room unnoticed. "Oh, Mr. Hare!" She went to him, all compassion and understanding kindness, and Jason turned away as from a moment which he had no right to share. He walked over to a window. There was a matter that he wanted to think out. He did; but first, like a lovely parenthesis, another thing interposed.

Cordoned by moss-draggled oaks, a lawn sloped to a sunken marble basin that tossed a jet of quicksilver into the air. Masses of flowers circled it; coral and peach and blood color. A girl stood there, the blossoms making an embroidery for her pale-yellow skirt. The golden afternoon sunlight saturated her. She was all life, in spite of the bent head and the wistful droop of the shoul-

ders. She was free now, he remembered, free to live her girl's life. The vision passed out of sight. The thinking process became possible again.

That book. That book Hare had mentioned, that Honorine had searched for. It had been published by no American or European house, but by an obscure little place in Bombay. A most dangerous book, he had thought while devouring it. No longer than a week ago it had been borrowed from this house by Doctor Welton, and returned. Jason knew that, because he had been forced to hurry through it. A dangerous book, devoted to curious cases of crime. It had given lucid, poignant accounts of historical poisons that had changed dynasties; of secret, devastating holds in wrestling; of the influence of the pneumogastric nerve over body and mind.

In particular, it had designated certain points in the body and head where a thin, sharp weapon might produce almost immediate death with the minimum of blood letting. Each method of violence had been handled scrupulously—no, with keen enjoyment, lovingly, luxuriantly, in a style romantically precious. A thug who had read Pater might have given it to the world. A style that made the string of horrors a row of little jeweled shrines winking evilly in the temple of some ghastly god of destruction.

He was entirely aware that the memory of that book influenced the thoroughness of the second examination that he made, after he had cleared the room of all of them except the trained nurse.

He stood for a second studying the cap which he had removed from the old head. Death had betrayed the last coquetry. Around the silk-lined circle of lace a ring of little white curls had been sewed. On the skull a few wisps of dull gray failed to cover the knobby skin, naked, altogether piteous.

"Miss Allenby," he said, "will you

put this away safely, and bring another cap?" When she had gone into the corridor, where he had noticed a line of mahogany presses, he bent swiftly over the skull, manipulating it gently. Turning on the electric light over the bed, he caught up the reading glass that stood on the bedside table. Yes, in one spot on the skin there was a smudge of red. He wiped it off with a bit of damp cotton. Under it was the small, undeniable puncture that he was looking for.

How infinitesimal a thing to shriek murder!

"But how clever, how clever!" he told himself. "If the hair had been real, if it had covered her head even, this might not have been noticed. Except for that book, it might pass for an ordinary scratch. Now, who else has been reading it?"

He turned to the nurse who was coming back with a fresh cap on her finger tips.

"Miss Allenby, have you seen a book called 'Ways of Deliverance'?"

Her clear eyes met his unsuspiciously. He realized that they were uncommonly sweet, and that she must be younger than her sedate manner implied. She had clean, fine-grained skin, too, and a well-balanced, pleasantly moving figure. Wholesome. She received his professional approval.

"No. I noticed it in the library some time ago. My reading has been pretty well confined to what Mrs. Hare liked to be read to sleep with." She added thoughtfully: "Of course it's a shock to other people, but to die suddenly like this must be the best way."

"It is probably a release," said the doctor formally.

"Oh, no," she surprised him. "She was the happiest person I know. There really was no reason why she should ever die. She liked it here."

Though he had given utterance to the conventional, sentimental reaction, he approved its absence in her.

"Who knew that Mrs. Hare's curls were false?" he asked suddenly.

"It's queer you should ask that," responded Miss Allenby, "because I don't believe anybody did, except Honorine and me. She's had Honorine for ages. She was morbidly sensitive about any one knowing."

The doctor drew the sheet over the still form.

"Stay here and be sure that no one touches her," he ordered peremptorily. "I must see Mr. Hare."

Throughout the brief interview he had the sensation that he was telling Hare much more than he himself knew, and was also hurting him abominably. Hare's protest against informing the authorities Jason was forced to override almost brutally. The coroner must be notified at once. At the mention of that official, Hare quieted.

"All right, send for Ritchie," he agreed. A stray memory brushed by Jason's mind. Hadn't Kathleen told him that Ritchie, who was a member of one of those run-down families that seemed to be numerous in these parts, was Hare's friend? Almost his only intimate, and under obligations to him? His arrival would pass for a friendly visit of condolence rather than a professional call. All the better.

"If you like," Jason offered, "I'll notify him now. I have to drive back to town, anyway. There are a few visits I must pay in that direction."

Hare placed a hand on Jason's arm with a pressure that seemed to be conveying something very important.

"Couldn't you come back with him, and spend the night? If Welton hasn't returned—there's young Williams who has taken over his practice before when he was called off."

Jason thought rapidly. He knew about young Williams. He was efficient enough. Probably, but for Kathleen's enterprise, he might have had Jason's present job. There were no

ticklish cases, by a miracle. And Welton would not mind. Hare was not only one of his most valuable assets, but a man he would like to assist in every possible way, in his trouble. Welton had advised calling on Williams if any emergency arose. And a murder in one's practice might be classed as an emergency.

"Very well," he agreed. He realized that Hare was clinging to him, wanting him within reach. He looked at Hare narrowly. The reference to the family heart trouble had not escaped him.

When Jason returned to The Poplars dusk was falling. They went in to dinner much as usual, he supposed. Death made little difference in the running of this opulent, well-ordered household. Nobody had dressed. Mona did not appear. Neither did Miss Allenby. He had already gathered that, although she had come as a nurse, the latter's position was now that of a member of the family.

Cecil dropped a fork, and said two words under his breath. There lurked in his glance a spark that was actually indecent. The demise of his grandmother, as everybody knew, freed the fortune which had been tied up during her life. If he hadn't been aware of it, Jason reflected, the gloat in Cecil's eyes, as he sat there like an umber-shaded picture in the candlelight that illumined the table, would have given the information away. It turned the doctor a bit sick.

There was little conversation, though Ritchie, a hearty, good-humored soul, tried to make it. Hare was sunk in his own thoughts. Jason wondered how much they might concern Miss Allenby. She would have no further reason for staying at The Poplars, and it occurred to the doctor that he would like to see more of her. An extraordinary sensation of discomfort and distrust, like a low fever of the spirit, was seeping into his mood. She reminded him of clear,

honest things, water under trees, wind on hills. He trusted her, and he'd be hanged if he knew what else in this house he could trust! Even the servants might hide, under their wooden faces—

"Man," he warned himself, "you're getting too psychic. Sit tight, and give the subliminal the go-by. It's too malarial. Don't do anybody an injustice."

After dinner Cecil vanished. Hare and Ritchie drew together, and Jason, propelled by the fear of being in the way, drifted out to smoke on the terrace. There was a stronger starlight tonight. The vine above the cane seat was no longer rusty fish net; it was full of newly blossomed evening glories like cloudy moons.

Mona made room for him. In spite of all that came after, Jason remembered this hour as one of the magic casements of his life. As she lifted her eyes he could see that she had been crying again, and the slight puffiness of the lids gave her that touch of appealing grotesqueness that goes to the heart more directly than beauty.

"I wish I could wipe out what I said last night," she murmured.

"I don't," said Jason courageously. "It was such—a bridge."

"I know," she answered softly. "We can't feel like strangers ever again." She leaned toward him. He waited, holding his breath, for the exquisite hiatus between their shoulders to be annihilated. The impulse must come from her or it would not be the same thing. Instead, she settled into her corner with a sigh. He was glad that she did not know yet that there had been anything about her grandmother's death beyond the natural falling asleep of old age. Violence did not go with this wistful night at all.

"I'm worried about another thing," she said abruptly. "Cecil says that he's going back to the East. He has always been crazy to since he went there two

years ago. And I don't think he ought to go—alone."

"I should say not," Jason agreed.

She broke the pause with another of her sudden changes of subject.

"Why do you feel it so worth while to be—decent? Because you *do*."

He took her words warmly at their true worth.

"What do you mean?"

"What real reason is there? Why should one resist the things one wants most? Just because it's wrong to take them? Is it just a bleak sense of duty that you believe in, or—" She broke off.

"She's trying to defend Cecil to herself, and can't," Jason thought. "I wonder whether she's fond of him." After a moment's pause he answered her frankly:

"I suppose it comes down to a plain question of self-respect. I have to spend my life with myself, and I prefer a traveling companion I can put up with."

"Is that all?" she asked, with vague disappointment.

"Not now." Jason hesitated. Drifts of perfume were sweeping from the garden. The moons were looking on like bland, amused faces that could not understand human antics. Why not declare a plain truth? He remembered a poem about a man whom the beauty of nature had tried in vain to spur. A stupid man. *"What was the sea for?"* Well, what was this unbearably fitting night for? Of course she must feel it, too. "No, that isn't all. I want you to find me—sort of congenial. Worth—caring about," he added quite simply.

She gave him a long, shy, intent look. Oh, he was going too fast. She wasn't nearly so intimate with him as his memory and imagination were with her. After a second he said gently, to relieve the tension in the air:

"You mustn't blame yourself for last night. I know how great a shock you have had."

"Oh, yes. To leave her, just as well as ever——"

Jason spoke carefully.

"Do you mind telling me just how you left her?"

Her head went back as if in surprise, but she answered directly:

"I was with her for a minute while Claire—Miss Allenby—went for her hat. She brought it in her hand and put it on before the mirror in the big cabinet. We had promised my grandmother to drive into town for a trinket which she had lost. Then I kissed her good-by. She didn't like it unless I kissed her every time I went out. And I said, 'Now when we get back we'll all have a nice cup of tea together.' She loved that. When we heard Honorine's step in the hall we went to the door to meet her. Claire gave her some order. Then we drove off."

"Was Mrs. Hare wearing her rings?"

"I think so. She insisted on wearing them most of the time." She hesitated. "When I shut my eyes I can see the big ruby. You know they've disappeared."

"Yes, I know."

"And when we came back——" The girl covered her face. When she got up and slipped into the house he did not try to detain her. She was with him still. It was not for some time that it occurred to him that there were two men inside who might wish to ask him more questions.

He found them in the library, a long, comfortable room that fitted around one like the curve of an easy-chair. The leather sofas, the rows of books, the rich, mellowed rugs, all looked used and essential.

It was a remarkable talk, direct, stripped of subterfuge. Hare, at least, spoke from the heart. It was like meeting a different man. Jason had taken him for granted as the usual retired business person, holding off boredom by means of a country estate, that enabled

him to spend a lot of money, and a taste for old-fashioned reading.

He padded to and fro in his large pumps, filling the gaps in his talk with uneasy movement. He had a trick of pinching the lobe of his ear when disconcerted, and now he pinched it cruelly.

"I know that I am asking a great deal," he repeated. "Perhaps more than a man has a right to ask. But I have reasons, valid reasons." He added, "I am not in the habit of asking favors."

"Nothing you hate so much. I know that," Ritchie bit his finger, embarrassed. "And no man ever conferred so many." He used the slightly important tone that characterized his public speeches. He was a local orator of repute. Jason understood that since this was the tone associated in Ritchie's mind with his most gratifying moments, it would naturally be the one he would select for the expression of genuinely deep feeling. The coroner's high-colored face turned a shade more rufous.

"Tom," he began, and he took Hare's hand ceremoniously in both of his, "you won't remind me of it, so I'll remind you. You once did me a kindness—well, you remember I told you at that time that, if it were ever in my power to return it, you had only to command me."

Jason watched, fascinated. So they still did these things, like a stage scene, but with just that heroic-homely gesture that saved them from becoming mock heroic. Ritchie lifted one palm and brought it down again into a firmer grasp.

"My dear friend," he said, his robust voice infinitely compassionate, "my dear old friend—but what you want me to do now is a breach of duty."

"It wouldn't hurt a living soul," said Hare hungrily.

"How do we know that? If, as the doctor says, this sad death was—not a natural one, there must be a criminal. Do you want me to keep quiet when the consequences may be the turning loose

on society of a murderer who may commit other crimes? You're not yourself to-night, old man, and no wonder. I wish you would try to get some sleep."

"Sleep?" Hare laughed gently.

"I know how you feel about it. The notoriety. An inquest is always a painful thing. I wish with all my heart that I could spare you. But it's our duty to get to the bottom of this matter as soon as possible. I've waited too long as it is."

"One moment," pleaded Hare. "Doctor Waverly, you are quite sure?"

Jason nodded gravely.

"I am quite sure."

Soon after Hare had insisted that he should go to bed. He lay awake for some time, thinking. The condition of Hare's mind must be a curious medley. Supposing that he had persuaded the coroner to let well enough alone, to ignore the facts? Had he counted upon being able to convince the doctor that he had no need to shout murder from the house tops? What argument had he counted on using? Certainly not money. Perhaps—Jason's interest in the family. Had Hare any knowledge of his two interviews with Mona? Good heavens, anything was possible in this house! With the first gauziness of sleep came preposterous, medieval scenes where the hand of the princess was the price of silence. For "the honor of the family."

But this was murder!

Jove, what a lot there was in a name! This one was like a bright-red clash of doom.

### CHAPTER III.

When he awoke it was morning. The early light was filtering into his luxurious, unfamiliar room. Branches were swishing on the window screens with the optimistic newness that dawn boughs never outgrow. And a bird with an utter lack of consideration was filling space.

"You—you! You—you!"

"Are you a detective or a troubadour?" the doctor demanded. "I wish you'd make your accusation less general. Something very flighty about your set, anyway."

His mind swung back into yesterday. A murder in the house! What a lovely world to spoil with noisome things. Lovely dawn and leaves and—Mona.

A phrase crossed his mind like a perfume; crushed field flowers, pink flowers, and subacid herbs:

Who art so lovely-fair and smell'st so sweet  
That the sense aches at thee.

What was the beginning of it? "O, thou weed!" He smiled. No, that was all off. Nobody could botanize a specimen like Mona as a weed. And the bird, singing to his mate like the ideal of monogamy, had a perfect sense of proportion. "You—you!" That was all there was to it.

Jason slid out of bed. He pushed up the screen and hung out of the window to gulp in the air that had strained through sweet-olive bushes. By stretching to one side, he could see the avenue where a long brush of light was tagging the trees, one after the other. The splash widened at the fountain and the bristling water flashed like a heliograph. On the other side, toward the back, Jason could see the clumps of poplars after which the place had been named. There was a whimsical satisfaction in finding the name justified. Beyond them lay a stretch of ground which had been broken up for some new bit of landscape gardening, and still resembled the beginning of the world. Zebra stripes of sun lay between the trees. The shadows were fleeing away.

He leaned out, then retracted as a turtle slips into its shell, and dissembled himself behind the muslin window curtain.

One shadow had disengaged itself, and was fleeing with irregular jumps and trots; the gait of a person unused to

running. It was dodging from poplar to poplar, awkwardly taking cover, heading away from him, but without any indication that it was aware of his supervision. When it reached the broken ground it assumed the nonchalant stride of a laborer who had every right to be there. It was dressed in overalls, and wore a cap pulled well down over the neck.

Jason, still watching, reached behind him for the chair which held his trousers, clutched them, and hastily put them on. Looking around for his shoes, he remembered that he had placed them outside his door. Those old cypress panels sometimes cracked like whips when you opened them. Investigation revealed a pair of tennis shoes in the closet. They probably belonged to Cecil and had no business here, but at this particular moment they were providential. He squeezed his feet into them.

To go through the house meant walking some one, or attracting the attention of whatever watchers kept guard over that silent, plump heap on the bed downstairs. From his window he could step to the roof of a porch below. A ladder of wistaria gave him an easy drop to the ground.

As he landed in a bed of verbena and stocks he again caught sight of the figure, disappearing around the corner of an old building on the far side of the open ground. He risked racing through the trees.

The weathered edge of the disused stable hid him while he reconnoitered. The figure was going more slowly over the littered and abandoned-looking space. There was something unnatural about the creature, something narrow about the shoulders, something knock-kneed, noticeable through the clumsy overalls.

It stopped before one of those structures which are used for the purpose of encouraging hens to lay at home like ladies, instead of forming outlaw nests and leading double lives abroad. On

a shelf stood a row of sun-and-rain-faded boxes, sufficiently open at the top to receive the tribute of eggs, yet effectually fastened by a board which extended across the whole row and was fastened by a padlock, thus insuring the deposit until called for. Jason was asking himself whether he had merely tracked the small game of a chicken thief, who did not know that the poultry had been moved into an elegantly appointed fowl run, when an exclamation reached his ears. Chicken thieves were ordinarily more fluent in gullah than in French. The figure rubbed its fingers violently, unlocked the fastening, and lifted the board.

It was at this instant that Jason caught the raised elbow.

The woman turned with a startled cry. A twist of blue paper fluttered in her hand. As she poured her rage and hatred on him through drawn, red-lashed eyelids he took it from her, and emptied into his palm a little heap of flashing objects. Two rings set with diamonds, a brooch where a flat sapphire glittered like a highland tarn, a belt pin with a smaller sapphire. He returned her haggard gaze, and waited.

"Before God, m'sieur," she whispered, her big, pale-blue eyes opening until the yellowish cornea showed all around the iris, "before God, I did not kill her!"

He sprung it on her.

"Then how do you know she was killed?" he demanded.

She staggered back, putting her hands behind her to steady herself, then cried:

"She—was? I did not know. I thought that she had died of herself. But I was afraid you might say that I killed her for the jewels. I found her dead. She—was killed? Who, then—"

"You understand that you'll have to explain about these to Mr. Hare," said Jason harshly.

As they approached the house she

moaned from time to time. When they reached the tiled walk that ran outside the ell she paused. Her brows drew together sharply. She indicated her grotesque costume.

"Monsieur permits that I go and put on a robe?"

"I can't, Honore. I don't trust you."

With a glance of disdain she turned her back, deliberately unfastened the overalls, and drew them off. Under them she was dressed in her usual neat dark waist and skirt, now decidedly crushed.

Hare was in the library, in the same seat in which Jason had left him. If he had gone to bed, he had certainly not slept. Ritchie, also, looked fagged, but when Jason began his story he rose alertly, and stood between Honore and the door.

"As God sees me, I did not kill her," the woman repeated in the same cracked, monotonous whisper.

Hare picked up the jewels from the table where Jason had laid them. In his own eyes a hard, gemlike brilliancy had replaced the beaten hopelessness of yesterday. An anticipation very nearly cruel sharpened them. Under his breath he said something. It sounded like, "I hope to God you did." Jason assured himself that he must have heard wrong.

"I entered," she jerked out. "I was in the library perhaps five minutes, maybe seven. Much may happen in seven minutes. I found her dead. I swear that I found her already dead. I was about to cry out, to alarm the house—then I saw the beautiful rings."

"Go on," said Hare unrelentingly.

"I thought of the old hen boxes at once. No one goes to them since the new work has been stopped. I figured to myself that the house would be searched when the rings were missed. But I could put them there for the moment, and later go back for them." She ended in a wail. "I had bitter need of money, but bitter, bitter!" All the

time she had been speaking she had given hasty, involuntary touches to her hair, her disturbed dress; had pulled out the narrow lace collar tucked in at the neck. Under their eyes she became the respectable, taciturn woman they knew, instead of the snarling, uncouth creature Jason had seen. The change had its effect on Hare.

"Why didn't you come to me?" he asked. "I have helped you before. It's that worthless nephew of yours, I suppose."

"Yes, m'sieur, but this time it was worse. This time it was—disgrace. I needed much money." Suddenly the cunning look of an animal at bay came into her face. "Monsieur, also, has a nephew who has given him trouble."

Hare gave a quivering start. Ritchie broke in roughly:

"You mean you did a thing like that for the sake of a nephew, a decent woman like you? I don't believe it. Now if it had been a son! I've known excellent women, good women, to steal for their sons."

Honore's hard eyes turned on him, and filled with tears. She spoke with a kind of desperate dignity.

"He is my son." Her glance took them all to witness. "I tell you this that you may believe me."

No one spoke. There was nothing to say before this twitching aside of a decently draped curtain. Honore's carefully guarded character lay smashed on the floor, like a piece of china knocked over in dusting. After a while she would sweep up the fragments, and they would ignore the incident, and she would merely loathe the sight of Ritchie and the doctor for the rest of her life. That was all.

"I've known women to stick at—*nothing*, to save their sons," said Ritchie meaningly.

She wheeled on him.

"I stole, but I did not kill."

Hare swept the trinkets over the

polished top of the table which doubled them like eyes blinking under water. He bent over them.

"Where is the ruby?"

"The ruby? I do not know. It was not on her finger, nor on the little golden tree where the rings hang at night. It was nowhere; I could not find it." If she was not telling the truth, her mimicry was good.

"Do you believe that?" asked Ritchie indignantly.

"I don't know," said Hare. Jason, who had received valuable intensive training in the scope of the human voice since day before yesterday, found himself continually weighing Hare's intonations.

Honorine whirled a light chair between them. The action would have been absurd had it not been so full of terror. Then she threw herself on the floor at Hare's feet.

"Do not send me to prison, m'sieur!"

"Oh, get up, get up!" said Hare, horribly disconcerted. "You know I hate this sort of thing." He pushed back. She dragged herself upright, and stood holding to the edge of the table.

"Do not send me to prison! I served madame for years, faithfully. And it was not easy, you know that. Sometimes it becomes horrible. One feels that one may go mad, also; that it is—*catching*. You know that. Wait a little while, and see if they will not find the right one who killed her—if she was killed." She lowered her voice to a hiss, looking defiantly over her shoulder at the coroner. "May I speak alone with monsieur? There are others who had more to gain—"

In answer to Hare's hurried gesture, Ritchie stepped back. Beckoning the doctor to follow, he went out of the house to the tiled walk which ran from this point straight back along the ell. The woman's voice died away like an underground river, full of the suggestion of hidden things.

"I wonder why she stayed so long in a place like this?" Ritchie reflected thoughtfully.

"What did she mean?" Jason asked. Then he pursued the memory that had crossed his horizon. "An English judge said that when you discovered the person who derived most profit from a crime you were apt to spot the criminal. She stood to gain her son's safety."

"People kill for all sorts of reasons, some trivial," said the coroner shortly. "I've known queer cases."

"Exactly," said Jason absently. Then: "What difference does Mrs. Hare's death make in the family—financially, I mean?"

The coroner gave him a swift, appraising glance.

"Old Hare, Tom's father, made what I call a fool will. Almost everything was settled on the old lady for life. She wasn't queer then, ten years ago. I think he wanted to insure not only comfort, but companionship, for her. Tom had something of his own, but no so much. The daughters had portions when they married, but they ran through them. According to the provisions of the will, the estate is to be divided into three equal parts. One third goes to Tom, one third to the boy, one third to the girl. So you know who profits most."

"She didn't dare imply—"

"Hush, don't say it!" Ritchie looked furtively about.

The windows were shut. The lawn stretched away, wide and empty, edged with trees and laced with a promiscuous tangle of pink and blue morning-glories. Their cups were trustfully open, like baby mouths, shining through wet webs of gossamer. With the touch of grandiloquence that infected his serious moments, Ritchie placed his hands on the young man's shoulders, bringing his red face nearer than was exactly pleasant.

"Don't you see?" he asked in a dramatic whisper. "You can't help knowing soon. Old Tom—the best man in the

world—nobody knows what he's had to stand from that young rotter. The sums it's cost him to pay up, hush up, buy up. It's no news to anybody that Cecil's a gambler—we've managed to keep other things from getting out—and a gambler's always in need of money. Old Tom's scared to death at this minute."

Jason threw back his head, and shut his mouth hard. The surmises that he had deflected, refused to contemplate, took shape, and made the air dense with suspicion. They had walked along the path while the coroner had uttered his last words. They kept on walking in silence until they reached the end of the ell, where the glass doors, rounded like a bay, made a little sun parlor. With a new curiosity Jason peered through them into the room. The armchair stood about six feet inside, blue, like a furry shadow; before it was the half circle of the cushion; the glass handles of the work table winked sleepily. Shadows of vines etched the panes. As Jason put one aside he called sharply to his companion.

"Look here, this window is ajar." At his touch it swung in, down to the ground. The two men stooped, then the coroner shooed the other away with sweeping, backward motions of his excited hands. On the sill was the print of an enormous bare foot. Outside were fainter traces that may have come from the same sole. The ground was damp and slightly muddy from the light rain that had fallen before dawn. On the tiling Ritchie's broad foot and Jason's tennis shoes made visible marks. The rain had confused the earlier impressions.

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated the coroner devoutly. "This is sure some find. You notice that heel. No white man has a heel like that. This will be the happiest day for old Tom—well, not that, of course, considering." He glanced at the empty room apologeti-

cally. "Anyway, it will be a load off his mind. Keep the window open with a stick, and help me put this cane seat against it. If I know the servants in this house, none of them are going to take the trouble to move it. It may be prehistoric to take plaster casts of things, but I still do it on occasion. Come along."

"What are you going to do about Honorine?"

"She did collar the jewels. Well, she won't run away. She has too much sense. Knows she wouldn't get far. She'll be glad to stay when she hears about this." He moved along almost with a dance step, his thumbs in his armholes, his chest dilated, smiling back at the morning with energy and relief. "Gee, I feel like Crusoe. I'll make a case out of this—the guy that constructed the dinotherium, or whatever it was, out of a heel bone won't have anything on me." He wrinkled his forehead. "The only darkies about the place are the hands working out of doors. All the house servants are white. The old lady had a prejudice against dark faces. I'll see whether I can't recognize an old acquaintance or two." He paused to wipe his bald forehead with yesterday's handkerchief. "Speaking of old acquaintances, here comes a couple of mine that I took the liberty of sending for early this morning. Another of my old-fashioned tricks. A little amateur work of my own."

Around the corner of the house came as incongruous a group as could well have dropped into a highly cultivated garden. The shambling, limping old man behind Jason recognized as the wood creature whom his sister's chauffeur had nearly run over two nights ago. He looked less antiquated by daylight, but even more unpleasant. A pulled-down cap, a ragged muffler, and a thicket of dingy gray beard conspired with spectacles to leave the minimum of face exposed, but even that much was unclean.

Jason wasted no more than a cursory glance on him, however. All his interest centered on the two hounds who appeared to be dragging their guardian along, rather than to be conducted by him. They were the most morose, disillusioned dogs he had ever seen. They walked with tails down and long ears brushing the earth. The skin wrinkled disagreeably on their necks. They were not lovable dogs; they were not even pitiable, because they seemed to be in good enough condition physically, considering their advanced years.

"Those aren't bloodhounds, are they?" he queried. Where was the sinister romance with which the detective stories of his boyhood had invested the species? Had he been a bloodhound he fancied that he would have walked with an air. But there was no swank whatever about these.

Ritchie chuckled.

"Sure they are. Might be descendants of *Eliza's* own. Morning, Naboth. I want to borrow those pets for a bit." He turned expert and wrathful eyes on the reddish-tan flanks. "What the devil you mean, overfeeding them like that? What damned use—" He checked his flow of language. Honoree was standing behind them, near the open glass door.

Some unclassified sense made the doctor look at her feet. Instantly she stepped aside, as though unaware of the crumpled bit of color on the ground which, he could have sworn, she was trying to conceal with her skirt. She addressed the coroner:

"Monsieur sent me to ask if the gentlemen would not like some coffee." She had restored her relations with the environment. She might be under suspicion of murder, certainly known as a thief, her reputation smirched, but all this was no reason why household routine should not be gone about decently and in order.

The coroner stooped over the object,

a balled, dark-blue silk handkerchief, without touching it.

"Bring those hounds here," he ordered. He laid his hand on the short chain of the nearer dog. "Haven't forgotten me," he grumbled, "too friendly by half. Give 'em a good sniff. Now then, Tom. Hey, Jerry. See if they'll hit the trail."

But the bloodhounds had no intention of working. Ritchie told them in unmeasured terms what he thought of them. Naboth argued in a sibilant speech which an impediment made half unintelligible. Had the hounds belonged to a union on strike they could not have expressed more unconditionally their intention of remaining among the unemployed. All that they would do was to return to their master and fawn about his feet. Even after Honoree, at Ritchie's request, had gone to the kitchen for refreshments, the hounds, unwillingly held back, consented to hit only one trail—that by which they had come and which led back to their own kennels. Jason watched with some amusement Ritchie's powerful figure being carried along, rather faster than he liked, in their wake. The coroner had declined assistance. He could manage them. Rotten with overfeeding, they were.

Jason, with some idea of being useful, remained on guard over the two objects of interest, the footprint and the handkerchief. It was some time before Ritchie returned. There was about him an intensification of his late subdued excitement. He had found something interesting.

"The inquest takes place this morning," he announced suddenly. "And, by Jove, I don't care how soon." In such a tone the general utters: "Now we can advance;" or the lover, "Now we can be married." His glance went whimsically over the doctor. "Is that your regular morning costume?"

A limp and yawning servant appeared at the far end of the vista, intent on

opening the house; not Johns, but an understudy. The involuntary stare which his correct countenance assumed apprised Jason of the extreme incorrectness of his own attire, and he fled upstairs.

#### CHAPTER IV.

As he came down later, clothed, shaved, and in his right, if still churning, mind, he caught the sound of voices. As a cat pursues the scent of catnip, as a pointer is unresistingly drawn into the broom grass, Jason yielded to the charm. At the brocade curtains of peacock blues and greens which had been half drawn across the door of the drawing-room he paused, and looked at the sight of the world.

The glassy floor took Mona's reflection as water takes water flowers. From the top of her smooth, pale hair down to her feet she flowed like a rhythm. She stood in what the French call "lost profile" to him, her hands clasped behind her, a slim white shape against the festival roses that were still massed on the walls.

"All the same, it's horrid of you," she was saying.

"I'm doing it for you, Pinkie, I'm doing it for you," Cecil's teasing drawl answered. He exaggerated the Southern slurriness that had clung to him through his interrupted Harvard course. He preferred being as exotic as possible. "For a really good ballroom you'll have to build out here." He balanced over the floor like a tropical bird, the long sleeves of his orange kimono moving evenly as he paced off the distance.

"You might behave decently to-day, at least," said the girl, as she went past him and on to the farther doorway. There she turned, and saw Jason. The backward look she gave him as she vanished put him into a glow. She had the gift of gracious silence, of implying something deep and wonderful between them, with the slightest of means.

Cecil pointed his cigarette after her.

"As ever," he said airily. "Grandmother had a rubber stamp for us. Isn't it sweet to see them together? Just like brother and sister—always quarreling." Her departure will be a loss to my conversation. She was eminently quotable."

"Yes?" Jason asked absently.

"Now Pinkie can go round to her heart's content. Society queen, darling of the inner circle. All she cares about." He slipped his arm jerkily under Jason's. "I'd as soon fall in love with a tree as with Pinkie. Pretty as a tree, and just about as much sentiment Green blood." He darted a malicious side glance. "Breakfast? We're the last."

Jason drew his arm away. Not for an instant did he believe Cecil on any subject, but the rose-colored mist in which Mona moved before him—the protective coloring of young infatuation—was jarred. This criticism would be one of the accumulation of impressions that Love would throw into some poke hole of the spirit, and screen, as soon as might be, with a hedge of roses.

The understudy was changing some plates in the white-paneled, landscape-papered dining room. The sun streaming in made it an entirely different interior from the candle-lighted, amber-colored picture of the evening before. After the man had served them Cecil sent him out of the room.

"Hate to be watched while I eat. I'm like the darkies in that respect. Try paprika on the melon; brings out the idiosyncrasy." He got up and went to the sideboard. "Have one?"

"Not so early, thank you. How many does that make?"

"Don't take the joy out of life, doc. Only the second. Have to have one to get up on, of course."

Cecil chatted on, eating almost nothing. He generally sat with his fine, emaciated hands flat on the cloth, or lifted to finger out inaudible tunes.

Twice he got up and brought Jason things from the chafing dishes that stood on a side table. It was a sumptuous breakfast, Jason noticed.

Cecil sat down again. He unfastened the purple-silk case whose cord was thrust through his girdle, and took a cigarette from it. Then he lifted the little ivory netsuke at the end of the cord. It was the figure of a smug, globular old man, with a high, bald brow. On this one eye had been inked in.

Meet Daruma, god of good luck," said Cecil. "When he does something terrifically good for me—again—I'll give him his other eye. You've got to keep these gods on a tight rein or there's no doing anything with them. And I'll need him soon." He caressed the fetish. "As soon as I can manage it I'm going back to the Orient. Only place nowadays where a man can be happy, and no questions asked."

"You've been there?"

"Two years ago, only for a few months, though. Met a man who'd been in the French navy; knew all the ropes—appropriately. We had a house for a while. Only time I was ever comfortable. Ten servants. You didn't even have to think up things for them to do; they thought up things for you. He was studying up native songs and"—Cecil hesitated—"and manners and customs."

A sudden suspicion crossed Jason's mind. Could this man who knew the ropes have been the author of that devilish book, printed in Bombay? There was no use asking, naturally.

"There's no good my staying here," Cecil informed Daruma. "Your sister wouldn't look at me." He flashed a wry smile at the doctor. "Any more, I fancy, than Pinkie would look at you. Pinkie will aim high. I don't blame her. A girl's life is such an unnaturally narrow thing at the best. And Pinkie hasn't had clear sailing. Did you ever hear of one thing that helped to cook the Hares

with the smart set—the thing that my grandfather said to old Mrs. Leverton, your sister's mother-in-law? She was expounding some custom of her sacred tribe, and he said, quite without malice, 'I see. Your upper class here corresponds to our upper middle class in England.' It wasn't as if he intended a slam, it was a mere statement of fact. The most priceless thing that ever happened here. If there is one thing anathema to the crowd, it's that word, middle class." He smiled, and his face became boyish and ingratiating. "Don't know why I'm telling you all this. You're a most accessible sort of chap, you know. Your sister says that strangers all pour their souls over you. 'And if they don't, he asks them a few delicate questions,' she said. When I asked what she meant by delicate, she explained, 'Oh, such as if they've ever been in jail or had any insanity in the family.'"

"She's fond of guying me."

"Yes, but seriously, do you think we have?"

Jason stared. So the whole talk had been leading up to this. The question sounded all but casual.

"Not so far as I know. Your grandmother's trouble was a sort of senile decay, not at all hereditary."

"Except that she wasn't either senile or decayed." As Cecil stretched across the table Jason noticed that his eyes, one slightly lower than the other, had darkened until the small pupils were hardly blacker. "I ask," he said evenly, "because I shall certainly be accused of the murder."

They plumb'd each other's glances. Then Jason asked, as quietly:

"How did you learn that she had been murdered?" It was the second time he had put the question that morning.

A shame-faced, yet brazen, look relaxed the tension of Cecil's stare.

"Little Cecil listened last night when you had that séance in the library," he responded sweetly. "I just had to know."

"Do you think that was the right thing to do?"

The other shrugged tolerantly.

"What is right—or wrong? It had to be."

"What makes you think you will be accused?"

"Why, look," said the young man reasonably. "Who else stands to gain so much? Everybody knows that I'm in debt, but not even Uncle Tom knows for how much. Everybody knows my principles, or the empty place where they ought to be. Ask old Ritchie. I'm the dog with a bad name. Only they electrocute now. Besides, I brought that book, 'Ways of Deliverance,' into the house. I knew how to do it. Moreover I write free verse and am therefore congenitally queer, and I need money the worst ever. Gentlemen of the jury, I rest the case."

"But—"

"Then only thing between me and the life I wanted, and peace of mind, was one imbecile old woman. Look at it from the outside. I believe that Uncle Tom suspects me. If you want more evidence, I was hanging about the house yesterday afternoon, and the marks of my tennis shoes are plainly to be seen this morning outside my grandmother's door, though I swear I didn't go near there. I haven't seen the things for weeks—lost them."

"I wore them this morning."

"So that was the way of it. Well, I couldn't prove an alibi. I'm the suspect."

"I don't suspect you," said he doctor.

Cecil gave a wild cackle of amusement.

"Thanks, old dear. I don't suspect myself, either, but it's very decent of you."

"Has Ritchie told you about the print of the bare foot?"

"What? No. Where?"

"Ask him. Outside the garden door. To my mind it lets you out."

"It would take a lot to let me out. I'm sorry that you can't consider me woozy," said Cecil pleasantly. "The only thing that beats a friend at court is a friend in court." He lounged over to the open window and stood framed in the panel of outdoors, a fantastic, dark-gold decoration, outlined in clear orange, under the dark lacquer of the hair.

## CHAPTER V.

The inquest was over. The coroner's jury, baffled, but tractable, had taken its cue from the evidence of the doctor, and returned a verdict of willful murder, against some person or persons unknown. The familiar turn of the phrase seemed to relieve their minds, giving them the conviction of having done the right thing. One of them, however, a substantial neighbor whose study of intensive farming had evidently affected his whole method of thought, insisted upon minute technical details, and maintained the belief that a certain species of gallinipperous mosquito was notoriously capable of making punctures like that, as the witness, whom he persisted in calling Doctor Woodstock, must know. Then a new thought appealed to him.

"May I ask," he inquired, in the manner of one who resents the probable withholding of important particulars, "may I ask what proof of mental deficiency the deceased was in the habit of giving?"

"On the one occasion when I saw her alive," responded Jason firmly, "she addressed me twice as Doctor Ivanhoe and once as Mr. Kenilworth. My name is Waverly." The juryman hastily capitulated.

The matter of Honore and the jewels did not come up at all. Jason understood that Hare would not prosecute. After all, the woman had been in his mother's service for a long time. The footprint was mentioned, but not

stressed. There had been other footprints about.

The young men from the local papers had been staved off by the assurance that the situation was in the hands of the proper authorities, and that their pardonable, if voracious, curiosity would be glutted as soon as definite developments definitely developed. All the early afternoon Miss Allenby had been busy disposing of condoling notes and flowers. A few callers had been received by Hare. Mona, he was glad to think, had seen Kathleen.

A cold lunch had been laid on the dining table, and one helped oneself when time served. Jason caught sight of some strange faces about the house. He wondered whether they were police officers. Of course that would come next. There would probably be a drastic search. The ruby was still missing, and Ritchie was of the opinion that when you found the ruby you would be pretty close to the murderer.

"Can you arrange to stay again to-night?" the coroner asked him dictatorially.

"Yes. Welton ran out this morning. He told me to do whatever Mr. Hare wants. He had a talk with Mr. Hare."

The coroner smiled.

"Good. The funeral is to be to-morrow. Some one will sit up with the remains to-night, but Tom may take it into his head to sit up, too, and he isn't fit. I want you on hand to exercise your professional authority. Another thing"—he lowered his voice, laying an impressive finger on the other's waistcoat—"I am going to have a sort of informal examination of evidence this afternoon, and I want you to be present. I have a kind of feeling about you, young man, as though you had the sleuth instinct. You caught Honorine. You led me to that footprint. You find the book next. There may be finger prints."

"Trouble is, there may be too many," Jason smiled. "Mine among them."

"And the ruby. Don't forget that. Tom tells me it's worth thousands of dollars. The idea of letting the old lady wear it! Just like Tom."

"What's the new evidence? Why didn't you produce it at the inquest?"

"Because I'm not sure. There may be nothing in it. Besides, they'd have frightened this witness to death, and learned nothing from him, in any case."

When Jason went with the coroner to the library Hare greeted him with a warmth that touched him. It was evident that anything resembling a friend meant a great deal to Hare just now. He looked broken and gray, but he had lost the haunted stare of the morning. Cecil lounged in, dressed more or less like other people. His air of subdued exhilaration might have gone with him to a first night.

Sunk into a deep leather couch in the corner sat Mona. Miss Allenby was in a chair near her. At the end of the couch stood Honorine, appearing as she usually did, stiff, and endlessly patient. Jason supposed that Ritchie had her here for some good reason. Her pale eyes turned slowly from one to the other of them, distrustful of what evil might come next.

Near the middle of the room, facing the light, stood a negro. He met the half circle of white people's eyes with the instinctive alarm of a trapped animal. He was a stooping, middle-aged man of the Guinea type, with high cheek bones that threw sooty shadows on his face, prognathous jaw, and retreating forehead. A dull, but not vicious, expression settled like a mask over his face when he was addressed. At other times his deep-set pupils roved with an apprehension singularly like the maid's.

Hare locked the door.

"We don't care to be disturbed," he said nervously. "We are all here, I think." He looked from the negro to the other standing figure, as if displeased. "Sit down, Honorine," he added

brusquely, but not unkindly. "You are too tired to stand." Then he glanced toward the doctor. "It is only fair that she should hear this."

With a murmur of thanks, Honorine subsided on the edge of a chair in the background. The corners of the large, rich room were dim, so that the three women seemed outside the scene.

"Now then, Sim," Ritchie began, "we want you to tell us all about it."

The negro turned his cap in his hands helplessly.

"What you-all gwine do wid me, cap'n?" he whined.

"Tell us how you spent yesterday afternoon."

"I done wuck by de new piece takin' out dem hurricane tree. I jus' been wuck; I been wuck tell sundown." His voice trailed off. He passed over his lips a huge, dingy-pink tongue rather like an alligator's.

"Did you ever see this handkerchief before?" the coroner flashed out.

Sim studied the square of blue, and shook his head.

"What's become of your black goat?" Ritchie demanded, like the crack of a whip.

The man jumped. One of his enormous bare feet shuffled out as though after a firmer hold on the slippery floor. He stood between two glowing, Oriental rugs, afraid to touch either.

"I dunno, boss. What I mean is, I gotter kill um cause 'e tuck sick, and what's mo', Mr. Naboth he say like he tromple down he crap. He ain't wut, boss."

"He wasn't worth anything, eh? You live at the Vineyard, don't you?"

"Yes, boss. Mr. Naboth he lemme an' Lizzie move dey las' week."

"And the goat," supplemented Ritchie. He pointed an accusing finger. "This morning I found that black goat hanging on some bushes back of your cabin, head down—with its throat cut! It's dark of the moon, too, now, isn't it?"

The negro raised a ghastly face.

"There were other things around it." There was an awful pause. Then Ritchie spoke in a hissing whisper, like a man telling the most bloodcurdling of ghost stories. "We know—*who* likes that sort of offering. We know *who* it is to whom nothing is pleasing but death. Death is the only thing that satisfies him. Death—with blood, for him—for—"

A chill went up the doctor's spine. The negro cowered.

"Don' say um, boss, don' call um by 'e name! He don' like um."

"For—"

"No, boss, no! Don' bring misfortune on de house."

"Well," said the coroner rigidly, "you know who. He's the only one you're afraid of. Mumbo Jumbo? You don't care a cent about him. Besides, he can't hurt white people. But this other one of— I'll tell you what you did. Your wife is sick. First you got the doctor to see her, and then you got the witch doctor and his filthy concoctions. You got her prayed for in the church, and when that didn't help you made a bloody offering to—"

"For de lub o' Gawd, boss!"

"To—that other one. Your wife's better to-day, eh?"

"Ya-as, cap'n."

"Gee!" muttered Cecil. He sat forward, a glow of artistic rapture on his quivering face. "Do they still do that sort of thing? Nearer than the West Indies? Sim, were you ever on an island called Haiti?"

"No, boss. My gramma, she come fum somewhey like dat."

"So your wife is getting better." Ritchie took up the tale where he had left off. "Off course she would be. That's the least *he* could do for you after *two* offerings."

A tremor shook the ropy hands that wrung the cap.

"Wha' dat, boss—two?"

The coroner rose to his feet. Like a

Daniel come to judgment, he lifted his palm in a magnificent gesture of arraignment.

"The goat—and the old lady!"

A choked murmur from Cecil made Jason dart a quick glance at him.

"Isn't old Ritchie a wonder?"

The negro rose in the air.

"De ole lady, ole mis'? I ain' tech ole mis'. I swea' ter Maus' Jesus, I ain' kill nobody, 'scusin' de goat. I tell yuh de troof, boss."

"I'll tell you the truth," announced the accuser, swelling like a turkey. "How you spent the afternoon. You were hauling those fallen trees out, wondering how long you'd keep the job after it was found out that you'd once been on the chain gang."

"Jis' a li'l while, suh."

"What for?" inquired Cecil, with absorbed interest.

"Jis' a li'l fambly trouble, my young massa. Me an' my wife—not de lady I got now, but de lady I got den—we been fight—"

"With what?" Cecil pursued the inquiry.

"Chai's, boss." Sim's tone expressed surprise at his ignorance. "Same like marr'd people fights all de time."

"According to Hoyle," murmured Cecil, relaxing. "I'm glad to know the proper weapon."

"And you were worried about your wife," Ritchie continued. "The church and the doctor and the cun-juh-man hadn't done her any good, and you knew that your last hope lay in—"

"Please, boss!"

"You passed the house, going for a tool or something, and you saw the old lady through the glass. A white lady and fat and rich. A fine mouthful for him. You'd offered the goat, and it hadn't been accepted. It's never any use to offer him anything but the very best."

"That's true, that's true," muttered Cecil. "All alike, these gods. Rotten spoiled."

"You hung around and watched your chance."

A new voice came from the gold-brown dusk in the corner.

"I saw him trimming the hedge, as I thought, as we drove away," said Mona.

"You waited till the coast was clear. Then you unfastened the window, and went in. You stood by her and said, 'Oh—'"

"No."

"But you left the mark of your big black hoof on the sill."

For the first time a ray of hope lighted Sim's abasement.

"Which way, cap'n, which way? Go in' out o' comin' in?"

"Coming in."

"Dasso, boss, dasso. Dey ain' none goin' out, cause none nebber gone in, no furder dan de sill." He gasped.

"Go on," Ritchie encouraged. "What I don't understand is that you didn't—shed more blood. You said, 'Oh—'"

Sim threw out his arms with a yell of protest.

"Don' call he name, don' call um, an' I tell de troof. I tell de wh-ole troof. If yuh call um, somebody gwine die, sho's yuh bo'n. I seen ole miss', like yuh say, fat an' rich like a shote, de ole buckra lady. An' sumpum tell me to do like yuh say. I open de winder what ain' been fasten', an' I plant my foot on de sill. I see de ole lady sleep. An', boss, I nebber gone in. I look at dat ole lady sleep, an' I gone home. I kill de goat, same's yuh say, to see if de goat don' do, to meck Lizzie well. An', boss, de goat do do. Lizzie heap better, de feber gone offen she. An' disher mawnin' I heah tell ole mis' daid. But I ain' kill nobody 'scusin' de goat. Gawd sen' de lightnin' ter strike me daid if I ain' tell de troof!"

There was a silence. Miss Allenby stirred. Hare, who had not taken his eyes off the man, gave an involuntary sigh. Then Jason asked:

"Can you read?"

Sim shook his head at the irrationality of these white folks.

"No, boss. Huccum I kin read?"

"There is one thing I want to say," Jason went on. "Pardon me, Mr. Hare, but to make such a stroke as—as the one that proved fatal, the person who dealt it had to possess an accurate knowledge of the vulnerable spot. How could this man have learned that? To stab in the wrong place would have meant risking a cry, a movement of resistance—" He stopped, appalled. The mist in the corner vibrated before him. He realized suddenly that there were two people in the room whose training might have fitted them for that delicate operation. He was one of them, and the other was Miss Allenby. The thought misted away as he remembered her frank, comforting eyes. Her whole self was an unanswerable refutation.

"If you knew them as well as I do," Ritchie was answering him, "you'd wonder what they don't know. If some of their old root doctors understand remedies and poisons, as they do, why not a secret of this kind? Some day I'll get the sheriff to show you the collection of jujus he's taken off them. Huh?" He beckoned to the negro. "I'll have to hold you, Sim. You know more than you've told us." He crossed the room and unlocked the door, then spoke to some one outside. With the hopeless obedience of a dog who goes to be whipped, Sim shambled out.

Cecil studied the two dull spots on the hardwood floor where the black feet had sprawled.

"This is a wonderful place," he reflected. "A piece of savagery like that. Why explore the jungle? Mr. Ritchie, what in Heaven's name is the name of that voodoo god?"

Ritchie paused in the doorway.

"If I were to utter it," he said solemnly, "one of the people in this room would most certainly die within the year—preferably myself. Not that I am in

the slightest degree superstitious," he added, and vanished.

Cecil grinned disgustedly.

"I'll get it out of him." He put his hand on Jason's sleeve. "Do you realize that this arrest is a blessing in one way? It will satisfy the authorities, and keep them from infesting the house."

"Are you sure?" Jason inquired. "There's the ruby still to be found."

Cecil's eyes held his.

"The ruby," he repeated lingeringly. "I'd forgotten the ruby."

## CHAPTER VI.

Jason had his own plans for the night. Mona made them easier by disappearing after dinner and leaving the cane seat on the terrace, which was already giving itself the airs of a trysting place, empty of all but divine memories. Jason went upstairs early.

He had learned the geography of the house. Over the living rooms were the bedrooms of Mr. Hare, Mona, and Cecil. For some reason Cecil used the *garconnière* only as a study and lounging place. He was supposed to be reading for a legal examination. Jason's room was behind theirs, and opened on a square back hall, whence a narrow staircase led to a side door which opened on a porch. He took the liberty of locking this door and putting the key in his pocket. Except the front hall, it seemed the only egress from this part of the house.

Behind his room stretched the upper floor of the ell. Honorine slept at the end, over her mistress' sitting room. There was no staircase there. None of the other servants slept in the house. There was a separate building for them, on the farther side of the kitchen building, which, in the old Southern style, was also detached from the mansion. Miss Allenby's room was downstairs, next to old Mrs. Hare's, on the other side from the sitting room. There were watchers in that sitting room to-night.

Nobody would attempt to get out through that end of the building.

And Jason was convinced that some one *would* leave the house during the night. Honoreine's words came back to him. "I figured to myself that the house would be searched when the rings were missed." Well, that still held. The ruby had not been found. Its temporary owner, if that person were in the house, would live in jeopardy every hour until the jewel was safely hidden outside. Some time after midnight would be the time to slip out. Without clamping his mind down to any particular theory, Jason was inclined to agree with Ritchie. Find the ruby, find the murderer. The thought that it might have been hidden during the day occurred to Jason, but he dismissed it. There had been too many people about.

The doctor possessed the not uncommon gift of setting a mental alarm clock. When he lay down, after partially undressing, he gave himself until twelve o'clock.

There was enough starlight gazing into the windows when he awoke to enable him to dress without blundering into the furniture. After turning his coat collar up so that no white should show, he stole, in noiseless slippers, out of the door, whose discretion he had tested, and through the corridor which led from his square hall to the upper landing of the great staircase. His idea was to gain the vantage point of the wide seat of the staircase window, blot himself behind its hangings, and wait. This was the old part of the house. It might be trusted to creak. The Adam ceiling above him multiplied like a sounding board any incautious rumor. The window recess was a natural gossip.

Halfway to the goal he paused, nose forward. All his senses reconnoitered. He was a bit too late. A faint glimmer of light came from below, a muffled noise reached him. It sounded, then sounded again, at regular intervals.

With a sort of tender agility he slid along the thick runner of the corridor, and stretched over the banisters. Below him crouched a figure, methodically moving from one step to the next, on its knees. It was like a strange rite. A shaded candle some distance off cast a doubtful illumination. Venturing down like a shadow, he was almost on the bowed head before the apparition jumped, tipped up its chin, and confronted him with the sympathetic eyes of Miss Allenby. Her mouth uttered not a shriek, but a sound of relief.

"Oh, it's you!" she murmured, as though his identity regularized the situation perfectly. "I was so afraid it might be Mr. Hare. He would hate this so."

"What are you doing?" was Jason's pardonable inquiry.

She gave an elucidative sweep of her hand.

"Look at those steps! They're a disgrace. The servants in this house aren't worth a row of pins. If they were colored, they'd at least clean the house properly for a funeral. I'm a Southern girl, and I know that. It's in the morning, you know. But these white menials—what do they care for the honor of the family?"

"Is there anything I can do? Polish a door handle, for instance?" asked Jason, highly amused.

"I'm going to look over the silver next. You never know when a teaspoon may have to see the light. The butler and the second man handed in their resignations after the inquest, and of course between now and the time they go they'll do exactly as little work as is humanly possible. I only hope the white maids won't follow their example. They adore Johns."

"Surely they're not superstitious; not those mummies?"

"No, merely respectable. It seems that sudden death in the family they deprecated, but could stand; but murder—it simply was not done in the households

they were accustomed to. They're what Honorine calls 'disgusts.'" She gave the last spindle a flick, and said politely: "Won't you come to the pantry, and have something to eat? There are sandwiches and coffee for the gentlemen who are sitting up with Mrs. Hare."

He might as well accept the invitation. This conversation in the hall must have frustrated whatever attempt the ruby's keeper might have made to get out. He would wait for absolute silence and security. The coffee was most acceptable anyway. In the intervals of sipping it Jason watched Miss Allenby going through vast quantities of flat silver with as much meticulousness as if they had been surgical instruments. There was an astounding feeling of naturalness about the whole thing.

"Your name is Claire, isn't it?" he asked, with absolute irrelevance.

She nodded. Her hair was mussed becomingly. He had never seen her in uniform, but the apron that she had tied on over her thin black dress recalled one of the most becoming of feminine costumes. The triangle of throat was like the cream-white blush of fruit blossoms.

"It suits you—your name, I mean."

"May I ask what you are prowling about for?" she interrupted, dimpling.

"I'm detecting," he answered. He spoke on an impulse. "I'm after the ruby, as a clew to the criminal."

Her mouth opened wide.

"Isn't it an awful risk to tell me? I thought the first rule of detecting was to suspect everybody."

"Yes, for all I know this picnic may be a subterfuge to draw me away from the real business. Only—I know it isn't. Miss Allenby, I wish you would work with me."

"You do trust me, then?"

"Sometimes I feel that you are one of the few people I do trust." He stopped, astonished by his own words. "Will you tell me exactly what happened when you saw Mrs. Hare alive for the last time?

Both you and Miss Grant testified at the inquest, I know, but there may be some little point, some trivial detail that didn't seem important, that you forgot. Just, for instance, what a person skulking outside might have seen through the glass. It's too late to look for footprints in the room." He took a notebook from his pocket. "It was too late when I got there."

She spoke carefully, as though reconstructing the scene in her mind, while her fingers were still busy with the silver. And as long as that subdued clinking went on the ruby was not going to venture out, mused Jason.

"Honorine had gone to her lunch," she told him. "I was waiting for her to relieve me. Mona and I were going into town to shop. You've heard all that?"

"Yes. Did Mrs. Hare have the ruby on her finger?"

"I don't know. You see, I didn't look at her directly during the last few minutes."

Jason made a note. This was new.

"I had gone to my room for my hat. I was putting it on before a mirror in that tall cabinet. My back was turned to Mrs. Hare's chair, but I could see the curve of her knees in the glass, and the tall side of her chair." She added, in a peculiar tone: "I wish I had looked at her."

He closed the book with a snap.

"Miss Allenby, you're not telling me everything. You're keeping something back."

She glanced swiftly behind her at the half-closed door. Then she made up her mind. She did not offer to shut it, and a faint, cynical memory swept him that a woman prefers to leave the door open so as to be sure no one is listening behind it. She leaned forward until she was all but touching him; her voice sank to a whisper.

"Doctor, I've been wild, trying to decide what I ought to do. There is some-

thing. I've fought with myself to believe it was my own fancy, but— It doesn't seem right to let that poor ignorant negro be punished for a crime which I believe—he didn't do at all!"

"What do you mean?" Jason's manner was like a compelling current.

"I must tell somebody. I can't tell Mr. Hare. I can't tell the police, for obvious reasons."

"Why not Mr. Hare?"

"It would be so—awful for him." Her voice dropped to tenderness.

Cecil again?

"Can't you trust me?"

"Yes, that's just it. I feel that you're the logical person to report to." She gave him the ghost of a smile. "I guess that's my training."

"Go on."

She clasped her hands together, as if to concentrate her memory.

"Well, I was looking in the mirror. The wing of the chair cut off all of Mrs. Hare except her knees. Mona stood by her, facing my way. She had already put her hat on. She put her hands up and pressed it down over her eyes. I thought how young it made her look. Mrs. Hare's sewing had fallen from her knees to the floor. She was plump, you know, and it slid off. She did nice sewing, though she generally forgot to knot the thread and it came out again. Mona stooped and picked it up, several little pieces, and laid it back in Mrs. Hare's lap. That took several seconds. All I could see of her was the top of her hat. Then she got up and kissed her grandmother and said something about having a cup of tea when we got back. That reminded me to meet Honoree at the door, when I heard her coming, and tell her not to allow Mrs. Hare to have any more sweets that day. She liked to nibble them, and it wasn't good for her. I generally took a look at Mrs. Hare before going out, but this time—I didn't."

She waited for him to grasp her meaning without the horror of words. He regarded her blankly.

"What else?"

"Don't you—see?"

The hanging off irritated him.

"No. What ought I to see?"

She laid her hand solemnly on his. It was icy.

"Doctor, I believe that when Mona kissed her grandmother, *she kissed a dead woman!*"

He stared, unable to believe his ears.

"When she spoke to her, she was promising to drink tea with a dead woman."

"And she knew it, you mean?"

She cried out at him, exasperated by his density.

"Knew it? How could she help knowing it? She'd been alone with her for minutes before I came in. Who else should know it?"

Her meaning went home.

"Mona!" he said stupidly. "Mona?"

Miss Allenby watched him, amazed in her turn.

"I see," she said simply. "I never should have told you, if I'd guessed that you were in love with her."

The touch on his naked soul furnished the force necessary to make it close like a sensitive plant.

"Miss Allenby," he said curtly, "what you imply is too preposterous even to get angry over. It's mad. Mona!"

Not in the least resenting his manner, she was looking at him pityingly.

"Of course you'd feel that way about it." Her marvelous gift for making the weird seem natural spread from her again. "Don't think I don't hate to say this. But you don't know how wretched Mona has been. You didn't hear her after that dreadful fiasco at the ball. She was wild for freedom. She was desperate. She blazed out at me, and then she ran out on the terrace and didn't come in for hours. Oh, doctor, perhaps you haven't seen as much of

queer families as I have. They're capable of anything—anything. Who besides Mona had so much to gain by it?"

"She gained no more than—Cecil."

She dismissed him with contempt.

"Cecil? He's a coward. He never could nerve himself to take a risk like that. But Mona's steel when she makes up her mind. Oh, to think of my saying such things about her! And she's so sweet in some ways. But she just couldn't stand it any longer. She had got to the breaking point. I've been wretched over it. But when I thought of that poor negro, like a trapped animal—"

"Whatever you think, will you keep it to yourself for a while, and give me a chance to work?"

"Yes, doctor, I'll be only too glad to. And nobody will be more glad if you fasten it on somebody else, outside of the family."

"You're not leaving soon, are you?"

A reluctant dimple appeared.

"No. Mr. Hare has asked me to stay—as a companion to Mona. I couldn't do that, but—"

"I have no doubt he will want you to remain on some other basis."

"I see you've noticed. He's such a splendid man. You have to summer him and winter him to find it out, he's so reserved. He cares for so few things. It's—it's a terrible temptation to make a person happy, don't you think?"

It occurred to Jason that she had not yielded much to that temptation in his case, but he answered merely:

"Then I have your promise?"

"Yes, doctor, I won't tell anybody. But may I say one thing more?"

Jason set his lips.

"You may say any madness you like, provided you understand that I consider it madness."

She came near him once more.

"Don't you see, if I am right, what a clever thing she did? She can swear that she told her grandmother good-by

—in the presence of a witness! I couldn't disprove her assertion. I didn't look at Mrs. Hare before we left. I can't swear that she was dead—I can only *feel* it."

He could only look at her, too angry to speak. With a sigh she picked up the tray of silver, and locked it in a drawer. Then she went out of the room and he heard her soft footsteps retreat in the direction of her bedroom.

## CHAPTER VII.

As Jason took up his vigil on the staircase window seat his mind presented him with a disconcerted emotion not unlike that which overtakes the man who sees a hurricane-struck room which he is supposed to reduce to order.

The hours were unnaturally long. The seat cramped him. His feet had to take turns to be comfortable, and one had just succeeded in dropping off into uneasy slumber when a shrill cry, apparently at his elbow, brought him bolt upright.

"You—you! You—you!" the birds twittered outside.

"Wrong, as usual," grumbled the doctor. "But at least morning's coming." He had raised his arms for a refreshing stretch when he refrained, and replaced them gingerly along his sides.

A barely breathed whisper of movement came from upstairs. His intent gaze could not distinguish even a silhouette, but two treacherous steps complained. Some one was descending with the velvet-footed caution of a cat. As the sound trailed into the rug below he lost the sense of direction. After a moment he followed, with infinite delicacy.

At the foot of the stairs he hesitated. A little glimmer came in through the fanlight, making the floor like a damp pavement. From the library behind him came a faint rumor indicating that a bookcase might have been opened. It wasn't a window. He had been obliged

to take into account the fact that he could not cordon himself around the whole place. A window might well serve as a means of egress. He had depended upon his acute hearing. Now he slipped around the corner as far as the library door. His hand went in and felt for the electric switch. He found it.

The room sprang into view.

With a squeal like a mouse that has been stepped on, the brilliant orange kimono whirled. A book banged to the ground with a clamor as outrageous as an explosion. Something bounced from it, and tinkled on the parquetry that bounded the rug. Both men swooped for it, but Cecil's hand grabbed merely the fist of the doctor. Jason shook him off, and held up out of his reach the cabochon ruby, freed from its setting, and burning like an epitome of all the sunrises.

"Give it to me. It's mine!" Cecil snarled, his face twisted with humiliation and fury.

"Since when?"

"My grandmother gave it to me the morning—"

"She gave it to everybody. I shall hand it to your uncle, the executor of the estate, and to nobody else."

"Damn you, give it to me!" His futile rush was countered by Jason's other hand. "It's as much mine as anybody's. She gave it to me, I tell you. I was going to sell it, and pay my debts. Then she died, and I knew that I needn't. It's mine. It's the most beautiful thing on earth. I was always crazy about it." His voice rose, reckless whether he was overheard. "Nobody could want it as I do. It takes a poet, I tell you! I've always felt that a burglar had a better right to your spoons than you have; he's willing to pay a bigger price for them. Some things you can't really own unless you take them—like the girl the Chinese poet writes about. It's *mine!*"

"What price did you pay for it?" asked Jason sternly.

"Did I kill her, you mean? I tell you I didn't. She gave it to me."

Hare stood in the doorway. In his flowing, dark dressing gown, backed by the breath-held glimmer of the early morning, he was like some tragic figure from the background of an old picture, some scene of martyrdom where the horror comes from the faces of the bystanders. Very quietly he picked up the book, "Ways of Deliverance," and laid it on the table. Jason silently handed him the ruby. The silence settled like a fog. Only far-off, whimpering voices of dawn punctuated it.

Hare tapped the book with a shaking forefinger, his eyes burning at his nephew. At last he said in a monotonous tone:

"So this is where you learned how to do it." The directness betrayed that long brooding had made the thought familiar. It was almost as if he had said, "This is where you learned to speak French," or, "This is where you learned wood carving."

"I tell you, I did *not!*"

"Don't be a fool, Cecil," said Hare, in the same dead tone. "You had better own up. The evidence—"

The long orange sleeves flew out on either side in a wild gesture of exculpation.

"Evidence? There's just as much against other people—and just as much motive! Who stands to get exactly as much as I do by grandmother's death? Why, they might as well accuse you of it—which would be absurd. You know that you've wanted to marry Claire for ages. You know that grandmother would never have endured it. We all had something to gain."

Hare gasped. Cecil held his arm out, the hand almost at a right angle to the wrist, as if to keep back his uncle's words.

"Not that I think for a moment that you had anything in the world to do with it. But—take the other member

of the family!" His voice hissed. "Who was with grandmother alone with her, a little while before she was found?"

Hare took a step forward. His menacing fist flew up above his head.

"You scoundrel!" Cecil dodged away like an immense and malignant butterfly.

"Who was the worst sufferer because of the old lady? I could get away. She couldn't." His voice rose shrilly, and rang through the hall: "Pinkle! Pinkie! Why don't you accuse her?"

Hare's hand was over his mouth. There was a short tussle. Then Cecil submitted. As Hare freed him he stood sulkily pulling his girdle into place, regarding them from under scowling eyebrows.

"Go to your room," Hare ordered, as if he were speaking to a badly behaved child, and Cecil slunk out.

Hare walked over to a desk of heavy, carved teak. One of its supporting columns was twisted out, with a curiously dislocated effect. Behind it yawned an opening, large enough to hold a moderate-sized book. Jason realized without being told that the knowledge of this secret compartment was Cecil's private property. No doubt he had brought the desk, also, home from his travels, very likely as a present to his uncle. He wondered what further secrets it might hold.

The scene had had one curious effect on him. Occasionally a human tone, a human gesture, breaks the guard of reason and produces conviction, entirely on its own merits.

"Mr. Hare," he said abruptly, "I came into this room certain that I was about to catch the murderer. I am perfectly sure now that I was on the wrong track. The boy was speaking the truth when he denied that crime."

Hare turned the jewel over in his hand, studying it.

"Whom do you suspect now?" he asked with difficulty.

"I want to keep an open mind. How-

ever—I'm not satisfied about the negro. Religious fanaticism will carry a man to any lengths. He did confess to the sacrifice of the goat. Ritual murder might not seem a crime to a fanatic. Do you mind going with me to the room again? I should like to see it."

Hare led the way down the long corridor of the ell. The sitting room at the end was empty and faintly lighted from outside. In the next room Jason thought that he could distinguish slight movements. The big blue chair had been pushed aside, but on the rug were four smashed spots where the castors had rested, easily discernible after Hare had switched on a couple of lights. Jason wheeled the chair into its old place.

"I want to reconstruct the scene that the negro may have watched from the terrace," he explained. "Will you please look into that mirror in the cabinet? As I sit in the chair how much of me do you see? Only my knees? Now, as I stand at the side and lean over an imaginary person in the chair you see only the top of my head, don't you? When I kneel you lose sight of me?" He added to himself: "Yes, she told me the truth—that far." He moved to the window.

"The negro might have crouched behind those laurustin bushes. Miss Grant says she saw him trimming the hedge. Honorine may have been out of the room for ten minutes; she admits seven. He may have had shears. But the weapon he used was something thin and sharp. What did he do—"

A perfectly obvious idea had come to him with the force of an inspiration.

Very tenderly, with the fairy fingers of a surgeon, his touch passed down between the sides of the chair and the seat. He drew out, one after the other, several small objects, and laid them in an orderly row on the table which stood by the chair. Two buttons, three small coins, a short pencil, finally something longer that glittered.

It was a thin silver sheath, intended to hold a pair of scissors. Planted in it, instead of the scissors, was a pin about four inches long with an opaline head. Jason drew it out with care. On the metal of the pin was a dim stain.

"I shall have this analyzed," he said, "but there is no doubt in my mind as to what it is. If, as the user meant it to do, this pin had gone into the upholstering, the fluid would have been wiped off in transit. Instead, this sheath was waiting to receive the pin. He had bad luck all around. Remember the false hair. Now, to find out where the pin came from." Elated by his discovery, he went on chatting happily as he rose to his feet: "Where can I find a long envelope? Minimum of handling best. No writing things in the room, are there?" Nothing had brought to his mind more sharply Mrs. Hare's detachment from life than this indication that she neither wrote nor received letters. "Well, I'll lay them in the drawer of the table for the present."

He looked up suddenly, puzzled by Hare's silence. The master of The Poplars stood, crumpling, swaying, one hand grasping the chair back, the other crushed to his breast. A bluish tint had wiped out the florid color from his face. Jason flung an arm about him, and tried to lower him into the chair; then, feeling his resistance, supported him to the sofa that ran along the wall only a few feet away. As he relaxed on it he pushed the ruby into Jason's hand. The doctor understood. He could glimpse Hare's vision of harpies hovering over his prostrate body, conjuring it away again. Jason dropped the stone into his coat pocket.

"I'll get you something. Don't be worried," he urged. He looked about him. The watchers in the next room, neighbors, he believed, would probably be as ignorant as he was of the whereabouts of the medicine closet. The facets of Cecil's decanter winked through

his mind. Then he remembered that Miss Allenby's room was near this. She would know. He went to the third door, on the corridor and tapped smartly.

She came out almost at once, dressed in a sensible dark wrapper, her abundant hair bundled under a net cap. In spite of her late hours she was comfortably dependable and fresh. As he noticed the blend of crispness and devotion with which she tended the patient, Jason decided that a man of quiet tastes and a possibly defective heart could hardly have made a better choice. If it hadn't been for her extraordinary hallucination regarding Mona, he would have admired her extremely.

It was some time before he left Hare, revived and fairly comfortable, in her capable hands. Hare made no explanation of his weakness. He asked that Ritchie, who had gone home the night before, should be sent for. Under the appeal of his haunted eyes, Jason bent down.

"Welton said that you were to do whatever I wished, didn't he?" Hare whispered.

"Yes, Mr. Hare."

"Then stay here for the present. Telephone him."

"Certainly. Would you like to see him?"

"No. You stay here—around the place." Hare closed his eyes, as if relieved of a burden.

It was full morning. The house was astir. Jason realized that his appearance, though less unconventional than it had been at this time yesterday, might be improved. He gave a few parting instructions to Miss Allenby. Then he took out of the drawer of the table the two small objects, the pin and the sheath, whose importance bulked in his mind as no less than terrific. He sent her on an errand while he removed them. He dared not trust them out of his sight. Things in this house had a disconcerting trick of disappearing.

Outside in the hall he stopped in the shaft of sunshine that streamed from the staircase window, the same window which looked so beautiful, with its felicitous, curved top and fluted pilasters, and felt so devilish; with whose mullion his spine had become so painfully intimate a few hours before. The march of events had hurried him. He wanted to be quiet; to collect his thoughts. In his pocket the ruby burned like a blazing coal. There was probably a safe in the house where the larger pieces of silver were kept. But who might not know the combination? A safety deposit box in the Pangborne bank would probably be best.

Something warned him that he himself was not the proper guardian for the stone. He had even a fantastic idea that the jewel resented it. Cecil was right, in a way, with his rotten poetic insight. These arrogant bits of magnificence chose their owners. There was a sort of life about them. One needed a species of divine right to justify possession; one had to be a very exceptional person. But Cecil, Heaven knows, was not one of these. He was a pretender. Also, like the servants, he was a "disgust." To save himself from suspicion he had dared to accuse Mona. The things which Jason had hesitated to think of Miss Allenby, because she was a woman, he pourred with great lavishness on Cecil.

The sun, striking red flashes out of it, brought him back to the other jewel—the pin which he carried in his hand, stuck in the scissors' sheath. He turned it, waking a flock of sparks like those struck from cobbles by a horse's hoofs. No, they were more satiric than that, like a series of sinister little jokes at somebody's expense. Jason's mouth curved at the corners. He was becoming a poet himself. A window had been opened for him through which winged waifs and strays were surging in. It was difficult to stick to facts.

3—Ains.

And just then, on the landing above him, Mona appeared. Her black dress intensified her slimness and the flawless, pearllike quality of her beauty. As he came forward the stone seemed to waken. The girl stopped. She put her hands on the balustrade, she leaned on them, her head sunk, her figure rigid. She gazed as though sight were as intimate, as cowering a thing as touch; as though she had been shocked into immobility by the unexpectedness and brutality of attack.

"Where did you find my pin?" she asked, in a strange voice. Then, terrified by her own words, she began hurrying up the stairs again.

He rushed after her.

"Stop!" he said breathlessly. "Your pin? Did you say it was yours?"

She nodded. The baleful little lights held her gaze. She came down to the landing once more.

"I suppose," she said, with a half-hopeless, half-contemptuous lift of her shoulder, "that you believe it, too."

"Believe what?" asked Jason fiercely. She would have to speak out.

"Where did you find it?"

"In Mrs. Hare's armchair. Thrust inside."

"Who else has seen it?" she went on, still in that dead, inhuman tone.

"Mr. Hare."

"What did he say?"

"Mr. Hare is not well," Jason answered squarely. "He had just had a most painful scene with your cousin. He fainted afterward."

The girl shook her head.

"He didn't faint because of that. He fainted when you found the pin—where you did, didn't he? He recognized it. He gave it to me. Of course he believes—what Cecil said about me." A pale, ironical smile twisted her lips. "I heard him. He wasn't restraining his voice much, was he? You see," she explained patiently, "I lost that pin day before yesterday. I thought it was in

the hat I wore that afternoon, but it wasn't. I had to push the hat down over my forehead to keep it on."

Like a picture, there came back to Jason Miss Allenby's words: "She put her hands up and pressed it down over her eyes. I thought how young it made her look." How had that pin been lost? Had the old lady, in her childish mischief, drawn it out while the girl knelt beside her, gathering up the scattered sewing? Or had that come afterward? He couldn't remember. Had the old lady drawn it out and thrust it into the chair? But then—what was the stain? He laid the cursed thing down on the window sill. He hated to touch it.

"Do you believe me guilty?" she asked suddenly, and looked straight at him. Her eyes were like flowers stirred by the wind. As though a clean wind blew through him, dispelling the mists—like that dawn wind which had signaled the water in the fountain, making it kindle into fire—Jason knew what he did believe. The expression of his belief came with it, as the poetic impulse brings along its words. There was only one way fit to express it, to make her know it beyond peradventure.

With an avid gentleness he took her in his arms.

"Mona," he said, "I love you—as even you ought to be loved. Will you marry me?"

She clung to him, rubbing her face against his coat with the movement that reminded him of a lonesome little animal. Only this time, his pulses assured him, she was not taking him for any one else.

In a moment she drew away with a most enchanting shyness.

"Thank you," she said sedately.

Emboldened, the comedy that lurks never far from a scene of young love thrust in a roguish face. Jason laughed joyously. It struck him as highly original to be thanked for a proposal of marriage. Then a chilling thought made

him humble. Was she turning to the lover or only to the good friend who would believe in her against any evidence, against reason itself? With a rush of delight he made sure that it was the lover. His lips met hers, and conquered them.

"Oh, stop, stop!" she said. "We're forgetting." Her tone chilled him again. "I—can't."

"Have you been refusing me all this time?" demanded Jason. "If so, I consider that your way of doing so is extraordinarily agreeable, but not strictly consistent. How would you accept a fellow?"

Her hurt eyes checked him.

"I beg your pardon," he said gently. "But—I do love you so. What do you mean? Why can't you?"

She let her hands cling to his.

"I can't let you love me. I can't marry any one until this is cleared up," she told him steadily. "Don't ask me. I can't promise anything until I am cleared."

The finality of her words, her calm, convinced him as protests and raving would have failed to do. There was no appeal. She meant it.

"Very well." He met her steel with steel. "Then my job is cut out for me. I'll get at the truth, if it takes a lifetime. I promise you that."

As he looked at her bowed head an impulse came to him. He took the ruby out of his pocket, and held it just where the silky, blond waves began over her forehead. It glittered like a gorgeous little round tulip, plucked from Aladdin's garden.

"It belongs there," he said. The ruby, well content, had made its choice. "Will you take care of this?" he asked. "Mr. Hare handed it to me for safe-keeping, but I think it would be safer with you."

"Yes," she answered. "I'll keep it about me until he's well. Let me go down to see him." She let him kiss her hands.

As she left him Jason started and glanced up. He could have sworn that he was being watched. Was that a rustle, a footfall? Recollecting the duties of life, he sought the telephone and reported Mr. Hare's wishes to his chief. Then he went to his room.

### CHAPTER VIII.

He had intended to make up his arrears of sleep, but he decided that he must substitute a cold bath. Life was too interesting to miss. His room had already been put in order, but a suit case which had been sent out to him yesterday, sprawled, half unpacked, as he had left it, on a lounge. It seemed to convey, ostentatiously, the impression that his presence here aroused no curiosity. Who had charge of his room, he wondered. He knew that there were at least two white maids.

He bathed and dressed without loss of time, but instead of descending in search of breakfast he lingered, looking out of the window. He knew, by all the traditions of the sleuth, that his next move ought to be some severe thinking, or at least an orderly arrangement of the evidence which he had collected. Unfortunately his brain had never been so difficult to coerce. He did not want to think; he wanted to bask in the feeling of Mona.

But here he became obdurate to himself. He had never been a self-indulgent person, and his training backed him. If he did not intend to assume his responsibilities, he had no right here. And then he made a marvelous discovery. While concentrating on facts, he did not have to put away the vision of Mona. That persisted as a warm, subconscious daydream. Just as a man might lie in a stream and look at the sky and work out a mathematical problem, all at the same time.

He *had* to think. How much nearer was he to the solution of the problem?

By this time the public knew of the arrest of the negro. That had given them something to chew on. It had also satisfied the authorities, apparently. Cecil had understood the value of this at once. It freed the house from supervision. The coroner believed the negro guilty. That let the family out.

The arrest would probably satisfy the press, too. These society crimes were a godsend, but the newspapers in this section of the country seemed peculiarly considerate. At all events, they would not indulge in unprofitable and painful surmises. They would follow the facts.

One thing had relieved him greatly. He had seen Kathleen after her visit to Mona, and had decided that she had no suspicions regarding any one besides the negro. That looked as if the inner circle was not yet gossiping. Moreover, tokens of sympathy had poured in.

So much for the outside world. Inside it was different.

Mr. Hare had dreaded that his nephew was the criminal.

Mr. Hare had been made ill by his suspicions of Mona.

Cecil had defended himself by accusing Mona.

Miss Allenby had accused Mona. Fools!

Miss Allenby? He mustn't leave any one out. Why, she had a motive, too, for desiring old Mrs. Hare out of the way. While his mother was alive the marriage with Hare was evidently impossible.

Miss Allenby might have known how to inflict the fatal wound. She had denied knowledge of the book, but then women occasionally fibbed.

Had Miss Allenby accused Mona, as Cecil had done, in self-defense?

Would she have had the opportunity? When she had lingered to speak to Honore, had Mona gone on ahead, and could Miss Allenby, after seeing Honore go to the library, have slipped back into the room alone?

He felt sick. He told himself relentlessly that certain famous poisoners had possessed the faces of angels. Madame de Brinvilliers, for instance.

The old woman had kept four human souls, at least, in bondage.

Five, perhaps. Honorine. Always his mind kept working back to Honorine. It touched her with the sensation that children in their games of hide and seek call "warm." She admitted that she had been searching for the book. Did not criminals sometimes gather safety from the nettle danger, by deliberately drawing attention to the details that they would be expected to conceal? Had she found her mistress asleep, perhaps—he had been told that she often dropped off suddenly—and killed her for the sake of the jewels? How Honorine must hate him. By his inopportune early rising he had burked her game. Otherwise, she would have gone back to the egg box later, retrieved the jewels, and sent them to the derelict son. How? By messenger? By express? And to what name? Honorine's name was Voiture, but the son might call himself anything.

Well, that was about as far as things went.

No. The handkerchief. The negro denied ownership. Jason believed him. Unless he had stolen it. It was of silk, rather a dandified handkerchief. And the dogs hadn't been interested in it. Wait—wait! The dogs had taken the trail home. The negro, Sim, lived there, too. But they hadn't taken the trail directly. No, the dogs were worthless. Ritchie had illustrated their worthlessness with the story of a spoiled blood-hound which had made friends with the criminal whom it had succeeded in trailing, won over by a piece of raw meat and a little flattery. They were picturesque; he hated to give them up—the hounds of legend, the man hunters—but he had better leave them out of the picture.

He frowned. An impression had

been pawing softly on the threshold of consciousness for some time. That rustle, swish, whatever the sound was, that had come from the upper hall, just after he had parted with Mona. Could it have been Honorine? What had she heard? Had she seen him give Mona the ruby? Had she seen the—pin?

Suddenly he clapped his hand to his forehead. It was a gesture of the purest melodrama, but inspired by one of the most stabbingly genuine emotions of his life. He was a fool! He was a consummate and incorrigible ass. The pin, Mona's pin, with the horrible little rusty-red incrustation on its point! He had placed it, still in the sheath, calmly and serenely on the sill of the staircase window—and forgotten it. And then had come the wonderful moment of a lifetime, when their souls had embraced. There were mitigating circumstances, but all the same he was a negligent ass. He exonerated and accused as he raced along the corridor. He ran his fingers over the window sill, hunting for predatory cracks. He knelt and hunted the stair carpet.

It was gone. Of course it was gone.

He tried to comfort himself with the hope that Mona herself might have come back for it, but he couldn't see it. What he did see was the vision of a white-aproned, large, red-headed woman scooping it up as she went by. Honorine had it, he felt sure. What would she do with the most damaging piece of evidence that had turned up yet—the lethal weapon itself? Would she try to sell it to Mr. Hare? He would undoubtedly buy, and destroy it. And he, Jason, would just as certainly keep silence, honest man as he was. It might be compounding a felony, but—

He was going too fast. Supposing Honorine *had* found the pin; she didn't know the importance of it or where it had been found. Why was he so sure of that? Who knew what Honorine might understand? She, like Mona,

might have been startled by Cecil's voice; she might have assisted at that interview from outside, in the shadowy hall, might have slid after Hare and himself, and become cognizant of everything that had taken place in the sitting room. Then she could have slipped up the back staircase in time to overlook the love scene. It had been a wonderful morning for Honorine, and he had kindly supplied most of the entertainment.

He threw the nightmare off. He was getting hipped on Honorine. Back again in his room, he regarded the landscape frowningly as he leaned out of the window. Those were the poplars under which she had run on her way to the old fowl yard. A hedge divided it from the intrusively plebeian overgrowth of Naboth's vineyard. A morning wind was visible in the poplar leaves; their undersides fluttered up like a flurry of snow. And before they fell, Jason had noticed something through the thinning foliage.

From under the clothes in his suit-case he rooted out a pair of opera glasses. He had expected to need them. He dropped to the porch roof below, and walked to the end of it. By hanging on precariously to an extended shutter, he got the perspective he wanted and waited for the next flurry. When it came, blowing the leaves to one side, he found himself looking through an aerial tunnel. At the end of the vista, against the hedge, stood two figures. There was in their attitude an indefinable air of secrecy and of intimacy. One was Honorine. Her hand was stroking the sleeve of the other figure. As Jason gazed her face bent down for a long moment, as if she were whispering. Then the picture went to pieces. She moved away among the trees. The leaves blurred. Jason took it in with a jerk. The man had been Naboth.

He felt dazed, as a chemist might if two elements with no apparent affiliation were to form a new combination. What

had Honorine, a woman who looked above her place in life, to do with Naboth, the dirty old man who kept bloodhounds and had an unsavory reputation for fooling superstitious negroes? Was Naboth the messenger who should have carried the jewels? No, it was something nearer, dearer than that. Ritchie had wondered why the woman had stayed so long in a place that she had described as conduced to madness. Had Naboth been the attraction? In some exasperation of loneliness, had she made a secret marriage with him? Was Naboth the father of Honorine's son? That furnished a motive for her concealment of their relationship. Who would care to acknowledge a degraded creature like Naboth as a husband?

A stiffness in his arm brought him down to earth. He was still clinging to the shutter. He legged back over the window sill. He met no one as he descended the back stairs, opened the door at the bottom with the key which he had purloined the night before, and went out into the garden.

Sometimes brutal surprise is more efficacious than finesse. At least it was worth trying. By a detour through the shrubbery he reached the point in the hedge where he had seen Naboth emerging as a man stands halfway in green water. He was still there, leaning lazily over the top. Jason made the mistake of calling out to him. Instantly the cripple turned like a startled wood creature, and began a jerky trot along the path between the rough young cassena bushes. Jason bounded after him, but Naboth ran surprisingly well. He looked like a bundle of autumn leaves lurching before a gale, the sun bringing out the faded colors of his innumerable rough patches, rusty-bracken, dun, fawn, and russet.

Suddenly he turned, snarling like a wild beast, lips drawn back. A twig caught his cap, jerking it awry. He jammed it back on his head, and uttered

a peculiar, shrill cry. At the sound a negro woman came running from the clearing behind him, where two tumble-down log cabins stood, looking as though they had grown up out of the soil. Jason understood that he had given the order to loose the dogs. He did not wait for them. Before Naboth had uttered the savage sound, Jason had stopped the pursuit. His purpose, his ideas, had been entirely changed, as by the two blades of a scissors.

He returned to the house, plunged in thought. His professional instinct led him to Hare, who was still resting quietly on the sofa where he had left him. Reassured, the doctor's mind had time to soothe the querulous appeals of his appetite. In the dining room he met Ritchie, halfway through a robust breakfast. After a glance at Jason that worthy dispatched the servant for another relay of most particularly fresh-made waffles. He looked fagged and less cheerful than the doctor had ever seen him.

"I want you to do some things for me," Jason began, without preamble. "See that nobody from this house goes to the Vineyard before dusk. Get that woman, Lizzie, off the place. Get her a permit to see her husband in the jail. Manage it so that all the servants attend the funeral this morning, and are watched the rest of the time. At dusk stop watching. And, above all, have a man or two within hearing of the Vineyard. They might hide in that old building near the egg boxes."

"I'll be there myself; wouldn't miss it." Ritchie smiled sardonically. "Am I to be trusted with any further information, or am I to go into this sight unseen?"

"I tell you, I know something," protested Jason.

Ritchie shook his head drearily.

"I hope you do, my boy. I hope to Heaven you do."

"What do you mean?" asked Jason

pugnaciously. He knew only too well. "Has Mr. Hare told you—"

"Tom's told me nothing. Poor old Tom sent for me with some idea of pulling the wool over my eyes, I believe. But I got it out of the nurse."

"She promised me—" Jason pulled his fury up.

"She didn't know how much she was admitting. Neither did Cecil." He added reflectively: "If we could only find the weapon with which it was done."

A quiet like the creamy skin on a milk bowl spread over the doctor's face. Thank Heaven, Ritchie knew nothing of the finding of the pin in the chair. He shouldn't know.

"Surely," he began, with a smile of derision, "you don't suspect— Why, it's preposterous!"

The coroner held up a restraining hand.

"Did you ever read anything by a man named Bernard Shaw? I borrow books out of Tom's library myself. Cranky man, but knows something about human nature. When this Shaw wants to make a character as hard as nails, capable of anything, what does he make?"

"What?"

Ritchie underlined each word by a tap on the cloth.

"He makes—a young—girl." He added: "Has a conviction that the new generation is the natural enemy of the old. That's sociology, I guess."

"Crazy," said Jason.

"Did you ever pause to consider," Ritchie pursued the chase of his new theory, "the absolute recklessness with which girls go into love affairs? If young men risked as much as they did, don't you think they might hesitate? But young girls—one idea-ed, that's the trouble." He paused. "I believe nothing until it's proved, but it seems to me that the toils are closing round," he decided portentously.

Jason smiled pleasantly.

"By the way," he observed, "when the whole thing is cleared up Mona and I are going to be married."

The coroner gasped.

"Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated. Then a smile as slow and unctuous as sirup spread over his countenance. "You certainly do work," he applauded, "in every department—with *some* speed!"

#### CHAPTER IX.

It was hardly as dark as Jason would have liked when he found himself for the second time that day on Naboth's ground. Having spotted the owner, by means of the glasses, in his former place by the hedge, Jason had worked around in a wide curve until he had reached the farther side of the clearing. A ragged fringe of bushes screened him. He felt in the side pockets of his coat: Flash light in one; in the other a peculiarly handy little automatic. This, he hoped, would be largely for effect. He tensed his arms experimentally.

The beaten-down stamping ground of Naboth was empty. Lizzie, he knew, had consented, that afternoon, to be removed to the hospital, reconciled by the promise that she would later be allowed to play Althaea to Sim's Lovelace, and cheer his captivity. The dogs, he had found out on his earlier visit, were kept chained. They did not even bay.

In the flattering twilight the weather-beaten shacks looked as native to the place as trees. Jason understood why Naboth refused to sell. The rough settlement was his integument, or his outer, looser garment. It was exactly like him. He would have been cold to the world without it. It was ragged, but with his homely rags; dirty, but with his own, familiar dirt.

Across the space he could glimpse the back of the uncouth figure, crouching over the hedge as though waiting. Who kept tryst with Naboth? Through a gap another form was coming, a

woman's. All that Jason could distinguish was an outline, blurred by the drapery thrown over the head and the stooping shoulders. There was a whispered colloquy. Then Naboth's arm shot out. The bushes rattled and heaved with the violence of a struggle. Jason dashed forward across the clearing. The deep voices of the dogs followed him, but he paid no attention to them. Why, the scoundrel was hurting her! With a convulsive movement the woman wrenched herself free, swinging back, almost falling. Her gasping cry pierced the dusk.

*Mona! Mona's voice!*

As Naboth wheeled toward the running footsteps Jason's fist found its appointed goal on the man's chin. It was absolute luck, but, as Jason told himself when he had time, it was inevitable. The predestined smash could have landed nowhere else in the universe. Naboth dropped like a sack of meal. Jason caught the girl in his arm, actually before his fist had uncurled. She was leaning against a bush, rubbing her throat. With a wild tenderness, the fingers of his left hand felt along the soft, bruised surface.

"Are you hurt?"

"Not much. It's getting better," she sighed. For a moment they clung together. Then Jason's hearing took cognizance of a sound that he had known was most important and had ignored for the last few seconds. The dogs. However, the advancing rustle did not seem to mind them any more than he did. It also must know that they were chained.

"Don't move," he murmured, as he drew Mona back into the shadow. They stood indistinguishable from the foliage. The crumpled heap lay in a faintly luminous patch that the starlight made, sifted through branches.

Into this space Honoree hurried, breathing heavily. She had evidently been running. Her foot struck the heap,

furry with shadow, like a fallen beast. She stood like wood for an instant; then she threw herself down and felt over it with frantic hands. Hissing appeals came from her. Then her self-control gave way. A scream of passionate grief came in gasps and shrieks as she gathered the man into her powerful arms, nursing him on her breast like a baby.

*"O mon Dieu, il est mort! Parle—parle à moi! Paul! Paul, mon petit!"*

Jason whistled shrilly. It seemed a brutal thing to do, but it was necessary. Moreover, he rather thought that all this tragedy, which Honoree's poignant voice was translating into shivers up his backbone, was superfluous. At the sound Honoree sprang up, and stood over the prostrate form like a lioness guarding her young.

"Oh—you! I might have known," she uttered, with scathing bitterness. Jason, by the aid of his flash light, proceeded to examine the patient.

"He isn't dead, Honoree. Get some water, can't you?" he told the unnerved woman.

As she darted away toward the cabins he swung the light around to include three men who had unobtrusively joined the group. "I rather think this is your prisoner, Mr. Ritchie."

"What—Naboth?" asked the coroner. "Well, I'll be——"

"No, not Naboth. Heaven knows where poor old Naboth may be. Under-ground, probably. This is Paul Voiture, Honoree's son, who has been impersonating him."

"Paul Voiture!" exclaimed Ritchie. "What? Quebec Paul, alias Frenchy? Why, he's wanted for a rum-running affair on the Canadian border where two revenue officers were killed. We've got his record. Who identified him?"

"His mother," responded Jason. "Supreme irony, isn't it?"

Ritchie spoke more soberly.

"If you'll resuscitate him, doctor, we'll

make him talk. Nothing like an autobiography for spilling the facts."

Jason was spilling water from the bucket, which Honoree had brought, lavishly over the prisoner.

"We'd better watch the woman, too," the coroner added.

Honoree drew her stately figure up. Through her abasement and despair gleamed the authentic flame of motherhood, compelling respect.

"Do you think that I would leave my son—like that?" she asked scornfully.

"He's come to," Jason announced. "Better not hustle him too much."

"Take him up tenderly, lift him with care," observed the coroner, who read books. He motioned by a jerk of the chin to two subsidiary shadows. They advanced, and gathered up the limp figure from the ground.

Mona came forward impulsively.

"Please, Mr. Ritchie, couldn't you take him to The Poplars first? I think Uncle Tom has a right to hear his story. He's so unhappy."

Ritchie and the doctor exchanged nods. The coroner led the shadow procession that started toward the twinkling lights of the great house, rows of them on different levels, like luminous fruit spaced on espaliered trees. Honoree walked close to the crumpled bundle which the two inferior shades carried. At a considerable distance behind lagged two fatuously happy silhouettes that looked like one.

## CHAPTER X.

It has often been noted that when every source of happiness and even of security has been eliminated, when the human spirit stands at the nadir of disgrace and doom, it can yet gather a sort of pride and satisfaction from one simple circumstance. Beau Brocade on the scaffold has the heart for one last swagger. He is the center of the picture. The limelight is his, undisputed.

Some such self-congratulation appeared to animate the thin, pasty-complexioned, red-haired young man who sat in Mr. Hare's library, facing an absorbed, if hostile, audience. To the casual observer he might have seemed a returned voyager, a Marco Polo or Mandeville, casting a spell on his enthralled neighbors. His quick, shifty eyes moved as if on swivels, taking in the effect. His ingenious fingers flicked a point home or molded an impression. He had an extreme versatility of facial motion. His voice was pleasantly deep, his English good. He had been allowed to wash and shed some of his Naboth rags, and he looked all but dapper.

At first he had refused to speak. He had argued with much warmth that there was no proof against him, other than his attack on the young lady. To her he apologized with a gallantry that made Jason's fist itch to hit him again. He had been sorry to hurt the young lady, but she had made it necessary by refusing to give up the ruby. She might have avoided all that unpleasantness.

"How did you know that Miss Grant had the ruby?" Jason snapped out.

Paul Voiture's lips opened in a singularly wide smile that exhibited two gleaming rows of strong, square teeth. They gave the impression that they might, if necessary, become fighting teeth.

"I was told that she carried it about with her."

"Who told you?" the coroner asked then.

Honorine's eyes, hot eyes that waited for the worst, considered him, weighing the value of confession.

"I told him. I saw the doctor give her the ruby. I"—suddenly she swung toward Mr. Hare—"I found the pin, also, on the window sill, the pin that the doctor had discovered—you know where, monsieur. It would have been better, perhaps, had the doctor waited before betraying my son to the police. We

might have come to an understanding. Now it is too late. Everything must come out. I gave the pin to my son for safe-keeping. He would have exchanged it for—he would have made an arrangement, no-doubt. Now it is too late."

Mona leaned forward.

"So that is what the note meant!" She handed a folded bit of paper to Jason. After reading it, he handed it to Mr. Hare, who dragged himself upright on the sofa where he was lying. He passed it to Miss Allenby, who allowed Ritchie to see it just before he went mad with curiosity.

You kin find somethin you want if you come to the Vinyard at sundown not befor an bring money to pay fer it. Dont tell nobody or you wont git it.

"Of course I went," said Mona simply. "I thought Naboth might have some clew to the murder, might have seen some one lurking about the place. I never thought of any danger. I knew Lizzie lived there, and I had helped her from time to time. And it was just the sort of crusty letter that Naboth would have sent. I found it on my dressing table this afternoon. I don't know how it got there."

"I do," Jason contributed. "This morning early, when Honorine gave this man the pin which she had just found, they concocted this note. She brought it back with her."

"You cannot accuse my son of anything worse than trying to take the ruby from Mees Mona." Honorine's statement was spoken like an order.

The coroner sat rather behind the others, like a background of communal authority.

"We can accuse him of the murder of Naboth. He has been living at the Vineyard as Naboth, and the real man has disappeared."

Paul Voiture's determined insouciance became edged with anger.

"I did not kill the old man. I found him dead, one day, when I arrived there.

I buried him—and, because it was convenient, I borrowed his clothes." He added negligently: "As for the revenue officers, I know nothing about them. I was not there."

"Any witnesses? To the borrowing, I mean?" asked Ritchie ironically.

Paul threw out his hand.

"If you will let me explain. I have stayed on Naboth's place before, several times. I do not deny that I have been in trouble. He was paid handsomely—to hide me."

"Trouble with the police?"

Paul shrugged.

"I came to be near my mother. It was better that her employers should not know of our relationship." He patted Honorine's hand as she stood beside his chair. "Maman had no reason to be proud of me."

"I guess not," the coroner put in. "That was when you made friends with the dogs."

"Yes. Animals always like me," Paul said, with complacency. He went on volubly: "Well, I found him dead. The make-up was easy. I have been an actor, among other things. Jack-of-all-trades. All beard and cap and layers of clothes. He had no friends to recognize the difference. Sim and Lizzie I allowed to come on the place myself, to disarm suspicion. The few negroes who knew him accounted for the small alteration by saying that Naboth had died and come to life again. They said that I smelled younger. I hope so. Of course they were of the most ignorant and superstitious kind."

"The point is this"—the coroner's implacable voice dismissed alternatives—"either you tell the whole story, admit you killed Mrs. Hare, or you stand trial for both murders. Since you've been in this room your belongings at the Vineyard have been searched." He drew from his pocket a paper parcel, and opened it. "They found some blue silk handkerchiefs, like this one—which

was picked up outside Mrs. Hare's window."

Honorine gazed at it. Her nostrils twitched, her mouth went crooked. "I killed madame," she said, as if daring them to contradict her.

Paul Voiture studied the blue object as though gauging possibilities. Then he reached up and drew down Honorine's head. He kissed her on both cheeks lingeringly, as though asking pardon.

"It is no use, *maman. C'est fini.*" He patted the red coils of her hair. "They have got me. I am sorry—for you." His voice sank to a murmur of French words. He faced the company again, like an actor taking the stage, shoulders back. "You are right. I was in hiding. I planned to get down to the coast, and find a ship to Guatemala. Some friends of mine are there and—one can manage things. But there was no good in going without money. I had heard my mother speak of the old lady's jewels and of how she insisted upon wearing them. They began to haunt me, those jewels. Ordinarily one would have made the attempt at night, but in this case night was more risky than day. I knew that a nurse slept in the next room, with the door and one eye open."

"Have you read the book, 'Ways of Deliverance?'" Jason interrupted.

"But yes. I see that you know, doctor. It was not gay, at Naboth's. My mother brought me books to read, that among them. A marvelous book. I had heard from my mother about the comings and goings in the house, the hours, the locations. All at once—the afternoon before last—I decided to act."

Mona slipped over to the sofa. Mr. Hare covered her hand with his.

"I reached the terrace without being observed. If I had been, it would have been only old Naboth on a visit to the kitchen. I saw, through the glass, the young lady kneeling beside the old one. There are bushes near, very convenient

for hiding. Then I watched the car drive away with both young ladies. I knew that my mother would come in next, but through the glass I saw her hesitate in the doorway, then go back into the hall. I did not care to have her know anything, at least until it was over. I drew my rubber gloves from my pocket before opening the glass door. That was easy. That cursed handkerchief must have been pulled out with them, and I did not notice it because I was looking so intently through the glass. The old lady had fallen asleep, as my mother had told me she did often all at once. I stepped over the sill without touching it."

He paused, for the thrill of the impending horror.

"On the ground by the chair I saw a long, very thin pin, tipped with an opal. Another piece of luck. One excellent rule is to use a weapon that is already on the spot, which belongs there, I had been told. Then one does not need to carry it away with one." He spoke as seriously as if he were a craftsman telling a trade secret. "Well, I had read that book. I knew the exact spot. Her head was lying in a position favorable for—using that pin."

Mona put her face in her hands. Hare drew her to his shoulder and hid his eyes on her hair.

"Afterward," the voice went on, "I pushed the pin into the chair, in the crack between the seat and the sides. The upholstery would wipe it clean, I thought. Then I began to take the rings off. There is where I made my mistake. I ought to have taken the pin and other ornaments first, those were easier to disengage. But the rings attracted me. They resisted—her fingers were plump. Suddenly my blood froze. There was a noise. Not my mother's footstep from the hall, but something soft and padding, outside on the terrace. I had time only to escape by the nearest way, through the adjoining bedroom. Then—I lost

my nerve. I did not dare to wait. I was frightened. I made my way back to the Vineyard."

"And you mean to say," Miss Allenby broke out with indignation, "that you had the cold-bloodedness to come there next morning, right outside that window, again? How could you?"

"I had to," Paul Voiture explained, as if to a child. "I did not dare let the dogs come without me. They might have tracked me down. As it was, they did; but Mr. Ritchie there was so confident that they were showing only a touching affection for their master—" He smiled faintly. "One thing I did not understand." He turned to Jason. "Why when you were chasing me this morning did you stop and let me go?"

"Your teeth and your hair," said Jason succinctly. "When you snarled at me I saw that you had two good rows of young teeth. Also, you forgot your limp for the first step or two. But what turned the trick was that branch that dragged off your cap. The sun caught your hair like a coal of fire." He added dryly: "Honoree has red hair."

Paul Voiture nodded.

"I have told the truth. But I did not kill Naboth."

"Was Naboth your father?" Jason asked abruptly.

The young man drew himself up, insulted.

"What an idea! My father was a very respectable citizen of Sherbrooke, in the province of Quebec. I have even been a medical student; he educated me so well. We speak both French and English there. Even the shop assistants know both languages. I can also speak the slang of your underworld. But not here. I adapt myself to my company." He smiled politely on the elegant circle which he had been privileged to associate with. His glance stopped at Jason, and hardened. "If it had not been for you, I should have been away before this. Had you not caught my mother

leaving the jewels in the egg boxes for me, I should have left that day. And this is what you *must* believe. My mother, when she took the rings from that dead woman, believed that she had died naturally. How was it discovered? I thought the hair would hide everything."

Honorine cried out.

"And I that never told him that madame's curls were false!"

He put her hand between his.

"Do not reproach yourself, *maman*. You could not know." At a motion from the coroner he got up and followed him out of the room.

To the group in the room came the sound of voices, the protesting one that of Honorine, who had gone after them; a rattle, two metallic clicks. Then footsteps died down the hall. Ritchie came back. The rending murmur of sobs lasted a little longer.

One person in the room, who had remained immobile as a rabbit charmed by a snake, came to life, now that the influence of the entertainer was removed.

"By Jove, what a rotter!" said Cecil.

Ritchie stood in the middle of the floor with the solemn, slightly grandiloquent manner that he might have worn for a Memorial Day oration.

"Before I say good night," he began impressively, "I wish to acknowledge that I have been guilty of a grave injustice, and I want to make a public apology."

Jason's heart jumped. Was Ritchie, whom he had considered a man not only of kind, but of delicate feeling, going to do the unthinkable? Was he going to tell Mona, before all these people, that he had believed her guilty of the most cowardly of crimes? Good heavens! He musn't. But before Jason could act the coroner continued with a rush:

"I was barking up the wrong tree. I beg pardon, I take off my hat—to those

two bloodhounds, Tom and Jerry. I humbly apologize. They were on the job all the time." His genial smile broke bounds. "They're all right!"

Jason and Mona escorted him to the front door, and sped the parting guest. Then, as naturally as the homing instinct carries two birds to the nest, they wandered around the terrace to their familiar cane seat. The mock moons of the evening glory vine were out in fuller vigor, but, as if to show them their places, a most hopeful and congratulatory little crescent dropped its garment of cloud and swam into view.

"Oh, Jason, how sweet of it!"

"That's what you reminded me of, the first time I saw you."

She would have been more than mortal not to have received this with:

"Did you begin to love me then?"

"I don't know. You howled me over. What clinched it was when you burrowed into my sleeve in that puppylike manner."

"Like this?"

After the recapture of the perfect moment of the past the girl said softly:

"Poor grandmother. She didn't suffer, did she, Jason?"

"No, dear love. I'm sure she didn't."

"Life's a terrible thing, isn't it? Except—this."

He took her face between his hands, and lifted it until he could look into the deep-sea eyes.

"Life is all sorts. This is what makes it worth while. All the troubles, trials, and tribulations. This"—he held her as if he could never let her go—"this is God's own way of deliverance. There's nothing—nothing better than this."

But Mona could not be satisfied without that supremely superfluous question which the most intelligent woman cannot deny herself at these supreme moments.

"Are you happy?" asked Mona.

# Beauty—In Any Form



By Arthur Tuckerman

Author of "Breath of Life," "Deep Waters—and a Reef," etc.

WITH a rising impatience, a sharp and eager anticipation, Eleanor Arden stood at the French window of her drawing-room and fretted at a one-horse *fiacre*'s leisurely ascent of the white road far below her villa. It had only just left the Eze railway station, and the road—like most roads in the region—was a twisting, prevaricating affair that hid itself completely now and then behind some cluster of pastel-tinted villas, or some garden wall garishly gay with a grape-colored cascade of bougainvillæa. It would be at least fifteen minutes, she realized, before Steven's antique conveyance could reach the villa.

Eleanor Arden was at that moment, if the truth be told; more acutely happy, more emotionally stirred, than at any other remembered occasion in her forty-nine years. With yet another three, sunshine-laden months of Steven's company to anticipate, life had once again become, for her, something far more than a mere question of existence. And Steven Arden himself, with his first triumphs just attained in Paris, his now maturer and more understanding spirit, would—she felt—prove to be more than ever the perfect companion. As a nephew he had, indeed, shown himself to be her most precious discovery.

She recalled vividly the day, three years before, when in answer to her formal invitation he had first journeyed down to the Riviera for a week-end—and had actually remained at her villa for the winter. The bonds between them had become so rapidly, so easily apparent. They were each without other living relatives; each of them moderately poor, yet educated to a rather fine perception; seemed to regard the world through identical spectacles. His artistic career, then only beginning, had become to her a matter of supreme importance and absorbing interest. He, in his turn, had probably discovered in her and in her home a sort of haven of refuge after weary months of unapplauded toil. She had been lonely and appreciative; and, gradually, had grown to love him as she had never loved any one or anything before.

The winter over, he had returned to Paris, promising to spend three months of every winter with her. And this he had held to, for three delightful years.

At the loudening creak of carriage wheels she went out to meet him, her tall, severely straight figure, clad in the handsomest of her pearly gray taffetas, suddenly and alertly youthful.

He was out of the carriage before it had stopped and, relieved of his bags by an attentive servant, kissed her pallid

cheek with an affection that was wholly genuine. Happiness surged within her to a culminating crest. He looked, she decided after a swift glance, stronger and finer than ever. Now, indeed, a splendid man. No longer the slightly reticent, sensitive boy.

"And so they took *two* of your pictures for the *Salon*?" she chatted, as they hurried through the formal little garden of palmettos and pebbly paths. "Oh, Steven, you deserved it if any one ever did. And sold one for ten thousand francs! Gracious, you'll soon be rich. But you must have a long, long rest this spring."

In the drawing-room, a demure little place of creamy walls and pastels and chintzy furniture, she became presently aware of a new quality in his countenance—a certain very definite assurance, it seemed to be, that he had discovered the world a perfect planet. At first she thought that his recent success was the cause of it; then decided that it was due to something altogether different. A momentary pang of fear gripped her heart as she asked him:

"You'll stay the three months, of course, Steven? I'm not closing house before May. But where are your trunks? I only saw two small bags in the carriage."

Her voice had assumed a pleading note. The faintest perceptible shadow of a frown crossed his brow. She knew then, to a certainty, that something—something radical, and affecting them both—*had* occurred during his absence. Something, moreover, that he had not written her about. What it was, exactly, she dared not attempt to guess offhand.

"I'm afraid," he told her, with an elaborately conceived casualness, "that I can't stay with you more than a few days this time."

"But, Steven," she protested. "But, Steven!" Then, more sharply, her fragile hand touching his tweed-clad knee:

"What is it? What has happened? I know you're concealing something."

There was confirmation in the wavering of his usually direct gaze. He studied for a moment, gravely, the pattern of the reseda carpet. Something of her suppressed, poised agony must have penetrated his consciousness. He was at last, she realized with a tiny sense of triumph, aware of the distress he was causing her.

"I'm engaged—and to be married very soon," he told her.

It was, of course, what she had actually feared. She had not been so foolish as to deny to herself that this must come—some time. But she had not expected it so soon. So cruelly and absurdly soon. Why, he had hardly commenced his career! She had not been given a chance to accomplish any of the things she was going to do for him; and she had hoped to do so much, so very much. The room then lost some of its bright cheerfulness; the radiance of the sun outside the French windows became commonplace, an uncompromising glare; even the aquamarine of the sky was, somehow, a mockery. She felt, all at once, rather old and miserable; a nuisance to her elusive and self-sufficient contemporaries.

"Tell me all about her," she managed to say, with a stiff little smile.

The girl was—naturally—marvelous, a paragon of sheer beauty and virtue; the only possible woman in the world for him. He was so absolutely and gloriously sure. The few others—they had been but evanescent fancies, of no account except as pleasurable memories. Eleanor Arden had to listen to all that, the immobile smile permanently imprinted on her peaked features, an immense, despairing loneliness gathering about her heart. "Youth will and must be served," she told herself; and attempted, by nervously rearranging some porcelain trinkets upon a console, to conceal from him her state of mind. A

steely resignation came to her as she listened to his enthusiastic details.

"I met her in Paris at a hotel dance. She's gorgeous. Her father's a banker in New York." Money, too, thought Eleanor. "You'll love her. She's terribly modern, but she's so—so superbly *genuine*. I've asked her down here, as a surprise for you. She'll be here to-morrow evening some time. At present she's stopping with friends at the Hermitage in Monte Carlo."

"Asked her here?" she repeated tonelessly. "To-morrow?"

He was, with all the blindness of his twenty-three years, palpably puzzled by her questioning.

"Yes. Why not? You always said, didn't you, that I could invite any one I wanted? We've had Harry Towner here, and Warren Beale—and lots of others."

"They were all men," she told him, with a curious abruptness that was foreign to her, and her gaze averted from his.

At length he must have understood. He was silent for a while, clearly bewil dered. He leaned over to pat her hand in the old, kind, characteristic way.

"You'll love her," he reiterated. "I know you will. And I don't believe I'd marry her if you didn't."

That made her angry. She pushed away his hand, eying almost frigidly his young strength, his air of certainty.

"For Heaven's sake, Steven, don't make such hypocritical statements! If you really love this—this modern young thing, nothing I could possibly say would stop you."

He was forced to admit the truth of this and, a few minutes later, he left her to ascend rather soberly to the little front bedroom that was always ready for him; always had been ready for him at any time during the past three years. Eleanor Arden remained downstairs, slowly clasping and unclasping her hands, repeating to herself:

"I'm an old fool. It was bound to come. I'm an old fool."

Beatrice—that was her name—arrived the following evening in an elongated, silver-and-blue motor, accompanied by a roisterous half dozen from Monte Carlo, a typical cosmopolitan segment of pleasure-craving Americans and young, penniless, handsome, Italian nobility. They gave one disapproving glance at the tranquil villa, the prim little garden; deposited Beatrice summarily at the gate, and drove off in a whirling cloud of dust. Eleanor Arden, emerging from the drawing-room, welcomed the girl gravely; and made an instantaneous appraisal of the small, alert figure in horizon-blue golfling skirt and yellow sweater, the corn-colored hair closely framing an almost pertly eager, lovely, intelligent face.

She's a determined little creature, Eleanor decided. She's sizing me up with those narrowed, amber eyes. When she's with boys those eyes will be very wide, and candid, and trusting. If I disapprove of her, there's going to be a clash—a horrid clash. She'll fight, and not at all subtly, for what she wants.

At dinner that evening, under tall, flickering candles, the three of them were quiet; indulging, perhaps, in a prolonged, mutual appraisal. Conversation was desultory, and not without perceptible effort. The girl in black, her low-cut gown carefully revealing a very white and immature beauty, told in staccato phrases of a round of pleasures that seemed to Eleanor both pointless and unedifying. Steven sat through the meal in silence. After coffee he rose abruptly, and announced his intention of taking the eight-thirty motor omnibus to Monaco.

"An art critic, an old friend, is stopping there for one night," he explained. "I know you'll forgive me if I run over to see him for an hour or so. Besides,

you two will have lots to say to each other."

He lighted a cigar; took his hat and Malacca cane from the coat rack, and strode out into the moonlit garden. He's dreadfully ill at ease, Eleanor told herself, and it's all my fault. I must try, try hard, to be—decent to her. She entered the drawing-room; discovered Beatrice Lane poised gracefully on the arm of a sofa, inhaling with apparent satisfaction an exotic, scented cigarette.

"Isn't Steven perfectly gorgeous in evening clothes?" she demanded. "In Paris, when he was working, he didn't bother to fuss up at all."

"I wonder," Eleanor mused softly, as she took up her knitting, "if that's why you love him—or think you do?"

"I love beauty—in any form," the girl admitted. "When I come to think of it, my whole life has been a search for beauty. Glimpses— Maybe it's in a somber old portrait, or a line in a play, or just a tumble-down cottage on the roadside. But, best of all, it's in human beings. Oh, but he's splendid!"

"There is a great deal more to Steven than his mere appearance," Eleanor said decisively. "There's his character, first of all. A character as fine, shall we say, as a blade of Toledo steel. Tolerant, bending when it should, yet unbreakable. Then there's his work, his painting. I feel positive that some day, if he keeps it up as he is doing now, he will be known as one of the greatest of American artists. That is because he's willing to study; to work and work, without being influenced by outside temptations."

The girl gave a slight toss of her head; lighted another cigarette.

"I know. He's done some pretty things, but he's not making any money worth speaking of. It may turn out that I'll have to persuade him to give it up eventually, if it doesn't pay. I know father would be glad to offer him some special position in the Paris branch. I've

got a pretty good drag with father, and Steven with his intelligence would get along wonderfully. This love-in-a-cottage business reads well in books, but Heaven help any couple who try it nowadays."

She feels that she is very much wiser than I am, Eleanor thought; but that, after all, is one of her privileges at twenty.

"If you made Steven give up his painting," she declared, "you'd destroy his soul. His career is determined, indicated, as clearly as a career can be indicated. You say you love beauty. There is a great deal of beauty in his work."

"But there's no beauty in poverty," the girl said, "especially when it isn't necessary."

Silence, for some minutes. The click and gleam of deftly wielded knitting needles; wreaths of cigarette smoke, faintly blue, from the girl's parted, geranium-tinted lips.

"I have an idea that you're very critical," she admitted suddenly, with a certain engaging candor.

Eleanor answered:

"Steven, you see, means more than anything in the world to me. I'm only afraid, my dear, that you're not fully appreciative. I'm only trying to be frank. As frank as you are, in fact."

"Well, let's change the subject," the girl suggested gayly. "Surely we've talked about one particular man long enough."

Some one knocked, just then, at the drawing-room door.

"Come in!" Eleanor called.

The door opened. A man hobbled into the room—a young man, scarcely more than twenty, yet he hobbled with a strange, sprawling gait, his knees bending absurdly as he took each step. He held a shabby cap respectfully in his hand; his clothes, too, were shabby. His whole body, as he stood nervously in the center of the room, was curiously

distorted—lopsided. A ray of light from a silk-shaded lamp on the ebony piano shone, obliquely and suddenly, upon his features. The girl uttered a half-suppressed little moan. Eleanor Arden said hurriedly, in French:

"What is it, Armand?"

He stood there, twirling his cap, trying pathetically to smile. He had come, he told her, to find out whether there was any more work to be done in the garden. He was grateful for the work she had given him to do in the previous spring. He hoped that she had found it satisfactory, as he was succeeding in building up a small trade in the immediate neighborhood. And all the time he spoke the light shone on his face, or rather on the pitiful, yet ghastly remnant of what once had been young, human features.

In the middle of the interview the girl rose; whispered to Eleanor: "Sorry, but I can't stand it," and left the room. Eleanor remained with the man for ten more minutes; promised him work; then, after seeing him to the door, commenced her nightly round of inspection, going from room to room, turning out lights, bolting doors, and fastening windows. At ten o'clock, on her way up to bed, she paused at Beatrice Lane's door.

"Good night!" she called. And added: "By the way, the war did all those dreadful things to poor Armand. He was once a handsome boy. I'm sorry it upset you. I suppose"—her tone was gently ironical—"I suppose your father wouldn't think of employing such a wretched apology for a human being?"

"No," came the girl's voice coolly. "I don't think he would. You see, he knows I can't stand ugly things."

At least, Eleanor concluded, she is not a hypocrite. Yet, climbing the second flight of stairs to her own room, fear for Steven once again invaded her heart. Wearily she extinguished the last of the electric lights in the hall. How *direct*

4—Ains.

these young creatures are, she thought. How direct and—hard.

Closing the green shutters of her window, she caught a glimpse of Armand, painfully descending the winding hill-side road. An eccentric, oscillating figure, alone in the white flood of moonlight.

Shortly after one o'clock that night she was awakened by the insistent ringing of the telephone at her bedside. Scarcely awake, yet with a vague sense of premonition, she picked up the receiver. After the habitual intermittent buzzing had subsided she detected a voice speaking in the nasal patois of the Italian border region:

"This is the Poste de Secours at Cap d'Al. Have you a relative by the name of?"—there came a pause, an insufferably cruel pause—"of Steven Arden?"

Her heart must have momentarily ceased to beat. Familiar objects in the bedroom—the ornate dressing table, the fragile chairs, the framed etchings on the walls—became all at once blurred, oddly distorted. She closed her eyes, and an appalling vision of a roadside hut bordering the Corniche highway, whither were dragged the victims of perilous, unlighted corners and speeding traffic, sprang involuntarily to her mind.

"He is my nephew," she heard herself saying, her own voice remote and barely recognizable.

"Then go at once to the hospital at Monaco," the voice told her. "We sent him there for surgical treatment. The midnight motor omnibus was run into by a *camion*, not far—"

She discovered, presently, that she was lying face downward across her bed. She managed to rise, giddy and light-headed; and with an infinity of effort sought her clothes. Mechanically she began to dress.

Five minutes later she descended the stairs on tiptoe. At the first-floor landing, before the girl's door, she paused

irresolutely at the sound of gentle, steady breathing. "I ought to tell her," Eleanor Arden whispered to the half-closed door. "I ought to—and yet, and yet, if *Steven were permanently injured!*" At the same instant an intolerable picture of Armand swaying dreadfully down the moonlit road recurred to her. She left the landing; groped her way onward downstairs, blindly.

She found herself struggling with a complicated series of bolts on the front door. They had been, on all previous occasions, so easy to manipulate! It was only then that she remembered to telephone to the Beaulieu garage for a car; and sat down to wait for it through torturing minutes, while the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly and lazily—each tick a tiny knife thrust at her heart.

At last she heard the muffled purring of the car upon the hill, and recognized the peremptory change to a lower gear as it tackled the increasing gradient. An oblique beam of light swept across the garden; illuminated for a fantastic moment a youthful portrait of Steven upon the decorous drawing-room wall. She drew her wrap protectingly about her shoulders, and hurried out into the garden. The night was crisply clear, an electric blue. A solitary palm was etched sharply across the face of a symmetrical moon. Far away, the Mediterranean surf uttered a prolonged, gentle roar, a perpetual caress to the rocks of Eze. The air was cold, and gratefully fortifying. These things she was fully aware of, in an obscure, detached way, as she climbed into the car.

"As fast as you can go," she bade the sullen, sleepy chauffeur.

The vigil had been long. At noon, urged by both the surgeon and the attendant nurse, Eleanor Arden left the hospital, and crossed the narrow, cobbled street to an unpretentious café. She seated herself near the open door; nerv-

ously ordered an omelet, a small flagon of Chianti. A drowsy waiter took her command, and ambled away to mysterious inner regions, flicking imaginary flies with a soiled napkin as he progressed. The noontide was at once warm and oppressive, with the first definite hint of spring; and, also, incredibly still. One thing, one fact penetrated her now nearly numbed consciousness. Steven lived. And Steven would live. The faintest of breezes, fragrant with the odor of burning eucalyptus logs, drifted in the café door from the wooded hills to the north, and fanned her throbbing temples. A stout woman perched at the cashier's desk dozed, her amiable head drooping; and a yellow cat performed discreet ablutions in a sawdust-covered corner of the sordid little room.

The waiter reappeared, but with a gesture of disgust Eleanor pushed the food from her, and stared unseeingly at a vivid patch of sky above the house tops across the street. She observed a motor halting, with a protesting squeal of brakes, at the hospital entrance. A diminutive figure in flippant blue jumped from the car, and ran to ring the heavy, jangling bell. Eleanor Arden left her table instantly; paid her bill; and hurried over to the gate.

The girl faced her, white and taut; defiant.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she demanded. "How dared you keep it from me? I'm engaged to him. He's mine—ever so much more than he's yours. I only heard a few minutes ago what had happened, when they sent to the villa for some of his belongings. Oh, you were just cruel!" Then she added, her voice wavering: "Is he really badly injured?"

"Very," said Eleanor.

"Is he—is he disfigured?"

A gust of rage, intense, unreasoning, uncontrolled, swept over Eleanor Arden. She found herself, suddenly, on the defensive. On the defensive not only for

herself, but for more precious things—her standards, her creeds. Where now, she demanded, were loyalty and faithfulness and—even—a sense of duty? Surface details. Only appearances. That was all these young ones considered; had been taught to consider. A despicable code. Their hearts, then, were rotten at the core.

"It is quite probable," she heard herself saying slowly, "that Steven will be disfigured for life. But he's conscious. Do you want to see him now?"

The girl drew back, cringing. A broken reed, a young reed swayed by a sudden, fearful tempest it had never known. No longer proud or defiant, merely pitiful. White, her tinted lips moving wordlessly, she nodded; and turned toward the hospital gate. She passed through it, by the bowing gate-keeper, and advanced a dozen steps or so into the cobbled courtyard. Then, abruptly, she halted, her face buried in her hands.

She came slowly back to Eleanor.

"I can't go," she said. "Before God, I just can't."

Eleanor led her to the waiting car.

"Take this lady back to my villa at Eze," she told the chauffeur.

The car trundled away. White dust lingered, in a hovering, opaque cloud above the surface of the street which was—once again—oppressively silent, deserted, in the all-embracing stillness of a French noonday. Eleanor Arden reentered the hospital.

It was evening. The narrow street was once more alive, throbbing with an endless, congested, crowding mass of limousines, tourist-laden omnibuses, motor cycles, and jangling tramcars, hurrying one and all toward Monte Carlo, toward the Casino, the restaurants, the fragrant, formal gardens, the arc lights and subdued strains of *czigane* music. The roar of traffic, the staccato notes of motor horns, permeated the ante-

room of the hospital, a somber chamber lighted by a solitary jet of gas that flickered, wanly, over a plaster crucifix. Eleanor Arden, motionless in one of the horsehair armchairs of the room, heard the chimes of a near-by church strike seven; chimes that reverberated, lingeringly, against stony walls. Down in the harbor a pleasure yacht whistled, with shrill impatience, for berthing space. She detested its coarse, arrogant appeal.

The door into the hallway creaked, and slowly opened; and, with a sense of utter incredulity, she saw Beatrice Lane on the threshold.

"You?" said Eleanor. "You?"

The girl came into the room; flung a cloak upon the back of an armchair near by.

"Yes. I've come back." Her tone was colorless, robbed of its bright, youthful incision. In the dim light her young face appeared to Eleanor at once grave and mature, possessed of a new and intangibly serene and fragile beauty.

"Wait a moment," Eleanor said. "Tell me—where have you been all day?"

The girl gave a little sigh; threw herself wearily into the armchair.

"I've been sitting, just sitting—on those red rocks down at Eze harbor," she said. "I've been there for hours, I guess. I really don't know how long." She brushed a hand across her forehead with a helpless little gesture. "It must have been days. I left when the sun set. It was beautiful down there, and quiet—oh, so quiet. Nothing but the lapping of the waves, and the wind in the stone pines. It was like"—she hesitated, and there was a tiny catch in her voice—"like being very near to God. It helped an awful lot, if you know what I mean. It helped me to work out things, all by myself; to see everything in a clear light. I made my decision at sunset. I got here somehow, I don't

exactly remember. By tram, I suppose. May I go in now?"

"You may go in," Eleanor told her, "if you feel absolutely certain about your decision."

"Thanks," said the girl, suddenly her proud little self again, and rose to walk head erect toward the baize-covered doorway Eleanor indicated. Her eyes shone with a kind of bright, bitter triumph.

The door closed softly behind Beatrice Lane.

Eleanor Arden suddenly bent her head. Her fragile body shivered, premonitory to an overwhelming flood of sharply released, long-pent emotion.

The church chimes tolled the hour of eight. The traffic in the narrow street had diminished to a thin stream, and the sidewalks were deserted. All Monte Carlo had sat down to sumptuous dinners on terraces gay with music light, and flowers. The impatient yacht, down at the Condamine port, had found its berth, ceased its uproar.

Eleanor Arden looked up, through tears, as some one touched her shoulder lightly, and discovered the dapper French surgeon standing before her. An absurd, overdressed little creature bearing no semblance to the stern, white-coated figure with whom she had passed the afternoon at Steven's bedside. A transformed figure, she thought whimsically, like—like a policeman out of uniform. He was drawing on neat white gloves preparatory to a hurried departure.

"Come, come," he said. "I told you hours ago that all danger was over. I told you, also, that there would be no visible signs of the accident—except, possibly, a slight limp. I can't understand why you insisted on assuming, all along, that there would be any disfig-

urement, unless it was because of the bandage over the wound at the base of his scalp. You seemed to take the very worst for granted."

"I must have," she murmured, although she had known at seven o'clock that morning, just as the surgeon had known, that the macabre bandage enveloping Steven's head covered only a scalp wound.

The surgeon, with a stiffly polite little bow, took up his hat, and left the room.

Twenty minutes passed. Half an hour. Still Eleanor sat, motionless. At twenty minutes before nine the green-baize door opened and Beatrice Lane came in. Very straight and young and confident again, she seemed to Eleanor Arden.

"I think you did a very terrible thing," she said in a whisper. "I have just gone through the very worst day of my life. In fact, I didn't imagine that just—living could be so awful. And now the nurse tells me that since seven o'clock this morning there has been no question of—of Steven being disfigured. Yet it was noon, I remember, when you let me go away." She paused, lighted a cigarette, and breathed in its fumes with wholly apparent relief. "After all, I suppose you have proved what you set out to prove. And"—her lips trembled—"I wasn't rotten, after all. Although I did—wibble, sort of badly."

She tried valiantly to smile, and a large tear rolled down the soft curve of her cheek. Instantly she drew from her cloak a minute, circular mirror, and a powder puff no larger than a rosebud.

"Oh, damn!" she murmured, grimacing. "I'm actually crying. What a thoroughly old-fashioned thing I must be. Crying really isn't being done."



# The White Rabbit

By Berthe K. Mellett  
Author of "Allison Shoots a Line"



**S**HE'S a high-riding hussy, and I admire her."

"High riding! I don't call it high riding to trail the way she does after Razzy. She acts like a white rabbit following around to see if the boa constrictor won't please swallow her."

Under the comedy of the remark there was a squeak of terror in Win Little's voice, and Eileen studied her face a moment before responding. She didn't like the hot, jade-colored light that her friend's eyes had taken on. And though it's rotten business to make bets on a girl's real complexion nowadays, the small, pointed face between curtains of crisp black hair suggested temperature. Eileen belonged to the school of women who advocate bringing on a crisis if you want to get it over and done with.

"All right," she agreed, "have it that way. It'll be all the more amusing when the white rabbit swallows the boa constrictor."

"You don't think——"

"I do, too, think. I think that Livia Mann's come back to her mountain home, empress of everything in sight, and what she wants she'll get. I, for one, don't grudge her a thing. She's too darned useful with her unearned increment. Look at this club. Can you get the picture of our having any place more luxurious than Oddey's drug store to loaf in if Livia hadn't toyed with clubs in London and assumed that, if

she wanted one in the Sierras, there couldn't be any possible objection to her having one, since the queen could do no wrong? Not in this town, you can't. Why even down Frisco way where it's getting civilized, there are still traces of the grand old Western taboo against anything wilder than 'The King's Daughters' for young females. And here, with your father and my father and a few other choice native sons allowing that a girl's place is in the home helping me can fruit, and that, if times have stepped out since the days of '49, it's that much worse for the times and they'll have to be spanked and sent to bed, where'd we be? Livia made pure gall stick on the last frontier of hard-shell Western chivalry, and just for that I'm going to present her with whatever she likes the looks of—including Razzy. Come on. I've got a heavy date, and Mell'll be up for tea and knocking the furniture over in a mad hunt for you, if he doesn't spot you the minute he arrives."

As the two girls left the room, a young man reconnoitered with one panicky eye around the corner of a wing chair that, back to the room, faced the fireplace. Alone at last! Unfurling the arms that held his knees up under his chin, he shot long legs out to the fender and sank into the upholstery of the chair until his weight rested halfway up his spine. The attitude was that of complete insouci-

ance. It was outraged, defiant, and scared: scared pink. His worst suspicions were confirmed. Livia was pursuing him, bent upon his capture. He hadn't been mistaken. Penniless, fallen from high importance in the community, the only dignity left to him had consisted in flight from Livia Mann. And now that last shred of pride was in danger of being torn from him.

Of course he had no business to be where he could hear Eileen's summing up of the case. But looking through a window of the club lounge, he had seen a big, cream-colored roadster easing into the parking space below, and had precipitately stowed himself in the first refuge that presented. If that refuge happened to be a big chair in the women's smoking room, it wasn't his fault, was it? What did women want of a smoking room, anyway? They certainly didn't confine their smoking to it. They trailed cigarette ashes all over the place as though they were afraid that, if they didn't, somebody'd forget they'd been educated in the East. It made him sick: this everlasting struggle of women to be no better than men.

Criticism of the other sex was a new development in Rasdale Strong. It probably never would have developed, if it hadn't been for Livia. In that childish pairing off which antedated the jazzier associations of later years, Livia had been "his girl." Balance of power had not entered into the relationship, and, if it had, it was on the right side. He was the nephew and heir of old Nixon Strong who lived like a sybaritic Socrates on his ranch in the foothills, and she was the daughter of hard-working John Mann. But John struck a vein of gold as broad as a two-way street in the Blue Virginia mine, and sent his daughter back to the England he still loved. And Nixon, having reduced his nephew's heritage to the minimum, died. With this reversal of their worldly standing Razzy stopped so much as writ-

ing to Livia. Pride had come from Nixon, and Western standards finished up whatever was left to do after pride got through. Nobody, least of all the girl herself, was going to see Rasdale Strong standing in line for the job of prince consort. There were other girls in the world: Winifred Little, for instance. Of course Win wasn't exactly a pauper either. But she didn't have the world by the tail like Livia. And she was an inferior little devil besides. A fellow got to feeling the debt was on her side, that she owed him a lot for seeing that she didn't run herself into trouble, and that eased a little the hurt of finding one wasn't so much the foremost young man of town as the sacrificial goat left behind to atone for an uncle's Lucullan sins.

Then John Mann died and Livia came back, empress, as Eileen put it, over everything in sight. And the chase was on.

Out in front of the club the big cream-colored roadster parked as nearly parallel as the meandering line of the curb permitted, and the girl at the wheel slipped her hands out of soft white gauntlets and looked up at the windows of the club on the second floor of the ancient Victoria Hotel. Seeing her for the first time an observer might have thought simply that here was a stunning, statuesque blond who was defrauding some worthy musical comedy by staying out of it. Then he would have seen her hair and become confused. It wasn't in musical comedy that those braided plaques of yellow over her ears belonged. Something musical, but not comedy. Confusion would have been added to confusion as he noted her eyes. Blue of an unusually deep tone they were, with an intensity in their gaze suggesting that their focus, once fixed upon a thing, was not likely to be altered. John Mann had come to California with eyes like that, had focused them not only upon the Blue Virginia,

but whatever else was unstaked except the sky. And when he cashed in he'd got what looked like a slice of that, too.

After regarding the windows of the club with approval, Livia slid from the roadster, entered the door that had been marked "Ladies' Entrance" when Bret Harte made copy of the guests passing through it, and mounted the stairs. She stopped to take a mental census of the gang in the lounge, then passed through the library and dining room directly to the women's smoking room and a chair beside Razzy.

That individual had again tucked his knees under his chin to conceal his not inconsiderable bulk behind the chair back. But now that, for all his cleverness, he had been found, he shot his legs out again and sank sullenly onto his spine.

"There's no autumn in this country," the girl said by way of greeting. "It's blazing hot summer, and then it's winter. I feel snow in the air to-day. Why don't you have Lorenzo bring some logs and make a fire?"

"Since you inquire," he growled, "I haven't paid dues at this dump yet, and don't care to make more trouble than I have to."

She laughed, got up, and touched a bell.

The amusement with which she accepted his status and set about alleviating it with her own was the last straw to Razzy's exasperation.

"Whereas you own the place," he concluded caustically.

Livia surveyed the room. She had lived long enough in England to love the harmonies of old rooms and fires and oak and brasses. She sat down and stretched her feet beside Razzy's on the fender in a particularly satisfied and maddening way.

They were not small feet, but they were beautiful, and had they belonged to any other girl in the world Razzy would have obeyed the impulse to fall

down and kiss the high curve of their insteps. But belonging to Livia, incased in velvety buck, straightened to soft, thick, heelless soles, they suggested nothing so much as the feet upon which certain lovely, baleful ladies of history had walked over sundry and assorted necks. Running his finger around his collar, as if to hunt for certain bruises of his own, Razzy burst forth:

"It's pernicious. It's practically making charity patients out of the kids you were brought up with, to hand a place like this out to them, gratis."

Lorenzo came with kindlings and logs, but Razzy's eloquence was released rather than restrained by a reënforcement from the proletariat.

"It's the cute little way capital has of eating its way into control."

"I was thinking of that very thing to-day," Livia interrupted. "Win's been acting so peeved and funny with me. So I went to her father to see how he'd feel about a scheme to distribute the installation cost. He was all for paying up for spilled milk, but—Razzy, I thought all the hand grenades were thrown at the new generation last year during the flapper scare. Wrong! Jeremiah Little's got a whole munitions dump that hasn't been scratched yet. He doesn't approve of clubs, nor anything else for girls. He's the most perfectly preserved specimen of the stone-ax father in the world. Of course he said none of his invective applied to me. He said I'd be all right in a den of iniquity like this or any place else, because John Mann's daughter was bound to be different from other men's daughters—with the opprobrium on other men's daughters. I gathered that the thing to do was to ease Jeremiah along, because he'd probably perpetrate some quaint old paternal act, if the fact that the world moves in spite of him was revealed all at once. So I said I'd stay around here pretty close and see that Win was all right. It's hard for

me to understand Jeremiah, having been raised by John—”

She had always called her father John. It was as characteristic of their relationship as was the trust he reposed in her and the love she gave him. But when Razzy heard her speak the name and pause as though her mind, caught by a familiar call, had gone hunting for a dear one lost, he felt his bitterness oozing away, and the dialectical wind leaving his sails. However a timely recollection that self-preservation was the first law of nature returned him to a surface show of his rancor. Slumping even farther into his chair, he assumed the expression of a bear who has mistaken barbed wire for a berry bush.

“Look here,” he groused, “I’ve got a lot of thinking to do.”

No answer.

“Well?” he inquired when she failed to respond.

“Sorry, Razzy.” She recalled herself and looked around.

That was too much. Adopting a new tack he leaned across the arm of his chair.

“Livia,” he said sententiously, “you’re too big a girl to play pussy-wants-a-corner even with an old friend. People talk—”

“Not about me, Razzy. John left a lot besides the Blue Virginia to his girl. He left— Why, Razzy, just because I’m John’s girl they believe—they—”

She choked, and Razzy’s Adam’s apple flew to the rim of his collar and perched there.

“For gosh sakes, Livia,” he begged.

“Sorry. I’m lonesome for John, Razzy. It’s awful, coming back here and not finding him. There’s the pick he started work with in Tuolumne County standing behind the door at the house, and his old battered hat on the hall rack, and everything—except John. It used to be you and John for me, Razzy; now it’s just you.”

Frantically Rasdale Strong reached

for the straws which customarily bore him up. They were water-logged. Pride sank; Western standards were no good; even blind resentment against her wouldn’t float. Nothing remained but the fear of the pursued, and he was baling madly to keep that up, when Lorenzo appeared at the door and said Mr. Strong was wanted on the telephone.

Razzy rose and fled.

Fifteen minutes prior to the life-saving telephone call, Win Little followed Eileen Feeny into the club lounge, mentally dodging the bricks of a house that was falling about her. Livia Mann was going to get Rasdale Strong. The white rabbit was going to swallow the boa constrictor. Razzy’s fight was as good as lost. What a queen wanted, she took. Envy of the other girl shot up like a flame through the hectic substance of Win’s mind, and the lava of recklessness poured down.

Leaving Eileen she went to the window to think.

A road-battered car came into the parking space below, and a rather tubby, businesslike young man got out. Win drew back. She had no taste for Mell Feeny just then. She was sick of him and his everlasting talk of land deals and the future of the Sierras, and the way his hair crept farther and farther toward the crown of his head. She didn’t want to talk to Mell Feeny. She wanted Razzy with his length and his strength, and the slick way he danced, and his ways that were like old Nixon’s. She wanted Razzy.

Across the street a wiry, middle-aged man pushed his broad hat back from his eyes and narrowed a stern, misgiving glare upon the second-story windows of the Victoria Hotel. Win had no more taste for her father at that moment than she had for Mell. “Choice old native son!” she quoted bitterly. “Victorian!” she added on her own account. “Hasn’t changed an idea since the days when fathers—fathers—”

Her mind came sharply upon a thought. For a moment she stood, partly hidden by the heavy drape of the window, her heart's action suspended. Then a surge of daring ran through her like new blood in her veins, and she stepped out into the room. At the same moment the tubby young man, who had mounted the stairs, entered. Restraining an impulse to laugh hysterically, Win sauntered forward.

"Hello, Mell," she said.

He beamed so rapturously that she feared a public embrace and sank into a chair.

"What you doing between now and dinner, Mell?" she questioned in a faint and innocent little voice.

"Why—dog-gone Helflinger—he picked this day to blow up from Stockton and look at the Bedford place. I been out there with him. Just got back. There's about ten minutes I can devote to throwing in a cup of tea, and then I got to get back and nail his signature on the dotted line. Helflinger's one of those early birds you got to stick around with if you want to catch the golden egg."

Win brightened perceptibly.

"Mell," she murmured, "I wouldn't have you lose that sale to Helflinger for anything in the world. Don't you even wait to have a cup of tea with me. Minutes count in big affairs like that. And I don't want any tea, anyway. I've got a headache. I'd drive to cure it, only it's mother's day at home and the family bus is all done up in white carnations."

"Take my car!" The young man reached as forcefully into his pocket as though he proposed to produce the preferred vehicle from that depth on the spot. "Poor little kid—no car of your own. I tell you one thing, young lady"—the key came to the surface and he held it up to emphasize what he was saying—"if this deal with Helflinger goes through I'll be fixed to buy the niftiest coupé on wheels for a certain

person when she says she'll marry me, and—"

"Thanks, Mell." Win's fingers fastened greedily around the car key and, jumping from her chair with an alacrity out of all keeping with headache, she made for the door. There she remembered to turn and smile wanly.

Out in front of Oddey's drug store she left Mell's car at the curb and sought the public phone.

"Rastus, honey," she purred less than a minute after Lorenzo had delivered her summons. "Come ride with me. I've got a car down in front of Oddey's."

Still suffering the sharp palpitations of escape, Rasdale left the club without bothering about his hat. Being one of those men who expect to drive when there is driving to be done, he paused only when Win failed to slide over and yield him his rightful place at the wheel.

"Listen, Rastus!" Win's sharp little voice could take on seduction upon occasion. "I'm all in. Dad's been acting up again, and nothing quiets my nerves except to drive or cry."

Razzy's emotions had been frazzled sufficiently for one day; he figured he'd pass up the tears, and walked around to the other door.

Regardless of a marked shortage of some characteristics in Win Little, it could never be said she lacked the ability to stir and hold the attention of men, and usually when in her company Rasdale deliberately gave himself over to that capacity in her. But to-day he couldn't manage it, somehow. A tendency to criticize and analyze and compare spoiled everything, and at the end of a half hour's climb into the foothills, he observed aloud that dusk was gathering in the valleys and they'd better turn back.

Win's eyes were green between her thick, black lashes, and the color of her whole face had gathered into two spots on her cheek bones.

"I'll tell you"—the words stuck in her

throat, but she got them out—"let's go on up to your ranch and have supper."

She took one hand from the wheel and laid it upon his. It was a tense, burning little hand and its pressure considerably reduced Razzy's tendency to criticize and analyze and compare. Nevertheless he had grown up in the rôle of big brother to most of the girls in town, and the big brother's code was stiff and starchy within him.

"That would be great," he laughed, "if I had a cook."

"We can get our own supper."

"I tell you there isn't any one up there. Not a soul."

"But, Rastus"—she put her hand back on the wheel and made appeal with her profile lifted warm and fragrant beside his—"that's why it will be so nice."

The big brother's code showed signs of deterioration. Still he clung to it.

"There isn't a decent thing in the house to eat."

"Beans. I'll bet there are beans on the back of the stove. And the hens will have had all day to lay in."

"Look here, if you're a famine sufferer, I'll tow you back to the club and sign a check for the whole bill of fare."

"If we go back to the club, Livia'll hop out of a corner, and you'll have to run like a startled chamois with its tail on fire and leave me. If you don't run, she'll get you. Everybody's betting on Livia. Eileen said—"

He didn't care to hear Eileen's wise crack again.

"My flivver's at Mike's machine shop," he said, "and I have to get it before he closes at eight to-night. If you'll promise to watch the time—"

"That's the boy, Rastus."

"I'll take you to the ranch," he continued doggedly, "because it's all right as long as you're with me. But if I ever hear of your chasing off on a spree with anybody else, I'll beat you."

"Will you, Rastus? Promise? Oh, you're the sweetest old thing—"

"Can that stuff and watch where you're driving."

But while he was out in the barn gathering eggs, the old familiar code revived and began to bellow heroics again. With a lard pail half full of eggs, he came back into the house.

"I say, Win," he called from the kitchen, "don't bother setting the table. There isn't time. We'll just fry a few of these and eat them out in the kitchen."

There was no response from the dining room, but a light flickered in Nixon's library beyond.

"I say, Win," Razzy repeated, feeling his way through the darkness of the intervening room; "it's geting late, and the clouds have a darned funny look. This is no place to be when it snows, unless you're prepared for a siege. Oh, Win!" No answer. Logs had been lighted in the library fireplace and a table drawn up before the blaze was set with plates and silver and glasses. Shadows leaped in the room that Nixon's taste and Nixon's money had made beautiful. The phonograph in the corner, keyed down with a fiber needle, was whispering and humming sensuously. In virtuous warfare against the atmosphere of the place, Rasdale lighted a lamp and removed the shade. He had finished this pious operation and checked the phonograph when he heard soft laughter behind him, and turning saw Win. Blinking her thick lashes against the glaring light, she held up two cobwebbed bottles.

"Look! I knew perfectly well there was another bottle of Scotch in the world, and here it is. The other's Pommard, and there's plenty more down cellar. Old Nick died before he'd finished his life's work."

"Put those things down!" Razzy stood back sternly. "You know damned well I'm too much like Nixon to start drinking and quit. So I don't start."

Humming, she set the bottles on the

table, restored the shade to the lamp, and released the phonograph again.

"I found a corkscrew and everything," she said, sinking into one of the two deep chairs drawn up to the table.

A kind of moral shaking of the knees seized Razzo. She looked eerie and frail and beautiful in the firelight. In Nixon's room, with Nixon's wine on the table, and Nixon's favorite diversion before him, the big brother's code sounded fatuous and puerile.

"Look here, Win"—feeling his own stamina gone, he tried to revive hers—"if your father ever finds this out—"

"Yes?" she inquired provocatively.

"You don't seem to realize—"

"I'm hungry, Razzo."

When he came back from the kitchen with a platter of eggs the phonograph had stopped. Win sat with her fingers around the stem of a glass that held a topaz drop in its hollow. His own glass was empty, but a squat, brown bottle stood ready beside it. The fire had thrown out enough thin smoke to fill the air with incense. Darkness lay outside the windows like curtains of velvet, and miles of silence lay heavy around the house. The room smiled and flickered its recollection of old Nixon and old Nixon's philosophy of life. Contending against it with his weakness, now that his strength was gone, Rastadale ate his portion of eggs in silence. Winifred filled his glass. He drank it off and capitalizing its momentary stimulation rose, pushed the plates on the table together and laid the tablecloth back from the fire.

"Come on," he ordered; "we've got to beat it now if we get to Mike's before he closes."

The girl reached across the table, filled his glass and then hers. He drank and stood, waiting for her to finish. She looked queer, and the bottle was nearly half empty. She must have thrown in a shot or two while he was scrambling eggs. Not that he blamed her. The

stuff was good. They weren't making anything like it any more. If he'd counted right, it was the last bottle in the cellar. In the cellar? In the world. The last bottle of Scotch in the world, and a little two-by-four splinter of a girl was trying to drink it all. Not while he—

He reached across the table and brought the squat, brown container over beside his plate. She laughed queerly and getting out of her chair started toward the phonograph. The movement recalled him. Shooting his wrist out of his sleeve he turned it laboriously until his watch was under his eyes.

"Come on," he said again, "it's half-past seven."

Steadying herself by a chair she wound the machine.

"Leave that alone," he commanded hoarsely; "it's late."

"Who cares about late?"

He took another drink and explained.

"You do, sister. Oddey hates the club, because it's taken a lot of business away, and all you got to do in his store is to give the club number to central and he's all ears. Understand what I mean? I mean that Oddey'll give the club a black eye by talking, if we don't shown up in town pretty quick now."

"That won't make any difference, Rastus."

"What won't make any difference?"

"Oddey's talking."

"You're crazy in the head, if you think it won't make any difference."

"It won't—make any difference—when—" She was stooping over a record album, and finding something to her liking she laid it on the disk of the machine. "It won't make—any difference—when—we're—married."

"You're bugs!" He laughed uproariously. "Say, I feel the damn stuff, too. Let's get out in the air."

"Why?" She was still fumbling with the record. "It won't—make any—difference—when we're—"

He went to the door and rattled the knob.

"Best place to talk rot like that's in a car. Not responsible what you say in a car—specially side curtains down. And we're not going to be married."

She looked up from the machine, her face pale and hard.

"Oh, yes, we are. You don't know dad, if you think we're not. 'Choice old native son—'"

"What are you getting at?" He crossed the room and faced her toward him.

"Oddey'll get the news to father, you can bet, and father'll hit this place about to-morrow morning. The parade to the nearest justice of the peace will start immediately after with—"

"Shut up. Put on your hat." Rasdale picked up the soft round headgear from the couch where she had thrown it upon entering the room and jammed it on her head. It went down obliquely. She laughed again, a single, jade-colored eye visible, and danced backward into the corner behind the phonograph.

"If you don't come, I'll go alone." Razzy returned to rattling the doorknob.

Holding Mell's car key up between thumb and finger, she flourished it for a second, then dropped it down the deep "V" of her blouse.

"I'll walk—"

"Listen, Rastus—listen, honey." She released the stop of the machine and advanced to the deep beat of Circean music. "Listen! You wouldn't leave poor little Winnie all alone, with coyotes howling and snow coming!" She held out her arms and swayed in the tempo of the dance.

Through her babble, through the dying protest of his own soul, there came council in the silky, carnal voice of old Nixon's philosophy. Why not? Wasn't she pretty, and weak, and couldn't she stir and hold the interest? What if something fine and strong and sweet had to make way for something that was

none of these? What if dreams had to go? Hadn't he been fighting dreams anyway, fighting and fighting them until his heart was sick? Livia! Livia! Livia with pale gold plaques over her ears like—like— What was it that Livia was like? Something to do with space, and mighty harmony, and a strong, clear call. If he could think what it was that Livia was like, perhaps the weariness of his heart would go, the pain! Bah! What was pain? Nixon knew the antidote for pain—Nixon knew—

He backed from the girl and poured the last drop from the squat, brown bottle. The pain still ached; the puzzle still went drilling and drilling through his mind. Rasdale pulled another cork and filled the two glasses on the table with liquid, purple velvet. The girl swayed toward the one he held out, laughing with her queer, green eyes. Music. Rhythm. Intoxication. His feet found the tempo that hers had found. He held out his arms. In hazy, hideous concentration they danced between the tables and chairs of the room.

Some three hours following Rasdale's flight, Livia had finished her dinner. She pulled John Mann's big chair before the fire in her living room and sat down to await the advent of her coffee.

The telephone on the desk behind her rang, and, smiling tenderly at the detail which John had worked out in his life, she reached around and brought it to her without rising.

It was Mell Feeny.

"Say"—the forced nonchalance of anxiety was in his voice—"where can I reach Win? Oddey said she phoned Strong, and the two of them started up to the mountains. I called Little's, and old man Little said you were chaperoning Win, so I called you. Not that I don't know Win's taking care of herself wherever she is, but she's got my car and I have to have it about seven a. m.

to-morrow to pack Helflinger back to Stockton, and—and—”

Livia let him flounder while she thought.

“Oh,” she said at last, “you mean you want to speak to Win?”

“Yes. Is she there?” Relief shot his voice up into a shout. Livia put her hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone to muffle any exclamation that might escape her. Win had phoned Rasdale. They had started toward the mountains. Win had been awfully queer for days and weeks. That odd, burning light in her eyes! She was such a little fool, such an utter little fool. And Jeremiah— By this time Jeremiah was undoubtedly thrusting his hard old arms into his overcoat and taking his stick from behind the door. Livia removed her hand from the mouthpiece, and spoke calmly.

“Win can’t come to the phone right now. But you’ll get your car.”

“She’s—she’s all right?”

“Everything’s all right, and you’ll find your car waiting out in front of Mike’s shop when you need it to-morrow morning.”

“Say, Liv, I’m going to nominate you for—”

“And, Mell, phone right away to Little’s, will you, and say Win is staying all night with me?”

“You bet your life I will. Say, Liv, I’m going to nominate you—”

“Good night, Mell.”

Almost before the connection was broken she was out through the kitchen.

“Mat,” she called toward a light upstairs in the garage, “bring the white car around right away, please.”

A gray head thrust itself out argumentatively.

“If you’re going anywheres to-night, you’re going to take the big car so I can drive you. It’s getting colder’n hell—”

“The white car, immediately,” she repeated and went into the house.

Even when he rolled up to her as she stood waiting in the driveway, wrapping a long, silver-colored cape around her evening dress, Mat continued to protest.

“I drove John Mann fifteen years, counting burros and buggies, and there’s snow to the northeast, sure as shooting—”

“Don’t wait up for me,” Lavia shut him off.

Snow fell when she was halfway to the ranch, and the wind drove the flakes in a horizontal blanket that coated the wind shield and lay under the low top of the roadster. Leaning far over the side she wrapped the fullness of her cape around her bare arms like sleeves, and kept on. Her fingers stiffened with cold. One at a time she retrieved the white gauntlets from the pocket in the door where she had stuffed them that day, and drew them on by the aid of her teeth. Through the thin sole of her slipper the throttle numbed her foot. Discounting the need of a brake on that steady climb, she turned her body to a torturing oblique, and set the other foot upon the icy lever.

Anger began to mount. Not the usual anger of women who see the men they love follow the first skirt that flirts itself across their line of vision, but the clear, thinking anger that had made John Mann victor in such few quarrels as he had entered. Razzy had to be forgiven utterly, definitely and finally. Not to forgive him might be to turn him to the solaces that old Nixon Strong had found. It was too bad that Razzy wasn’t hard enough to stand up under the punishment that instinct urged her to mete out. But more important than punishing Razzy, was saving Razzy. As for Win—Win was another matter. Win was tough. She would take Win home and keep her over night, and in the morning she would dress her down properly. After all, that was more merciful than turning her over to Jeremiah.

Five miles from the ranch she began to watch for lights in the house, but though the oaks of the hills were denuded, the snow was an impenetrable curtain. It fell so fast and lay so thick that, if the road had not been cut like a cañon in the rocks, she could not have followed it. Up and up climbed the white car, its splendid engine silent in the thick air. Grotesqueries of familiar landmarks began to appear. That giant stalk of asparagus was Razzy's corner post, pointed with snow. That vast, sparkling mushroom was the live oak back of the barn. Those feathery strips of swansdown were barbed wires running up to the gate. The gate stood open. White-roofed, Mell's car waited patiently in the yard. Bringing the roadster to a stop, she bit her lips at the pain of moving her cold and rigid muscles, set pointed, ominous slipper marks in the snow on Razzy's steps, and opened the door.

Razzy partly lay, partly sat, at a table before the chimney. The fire was dead. His arms were stretched out and his head was down upon them, his hands gripped together until each finger left a greenish pallor where it was imbedded. The cloth was stained and rumpled. Dishes and bottles and glasses covered it in ugly disarray. Across from Razzy, Win lay back in her chair, asleep, dead to the world.

Razzy's ears did not report Livia's entrance, but when the cold air of the outdoors night blew upon him he raised his head. His hands remained gripped on the table, and under the soft light of the lamp his face took on their pallor as he stared at the apparition, tall and snow sequined and gold crowned before him.

"Brunhilde," he whispered. "Now I know—that it's Brunhilde."

Livia closed the door softly.

"Find some blankets to wrap her in," she said, nodding toward Winifred.

"Brunhilde"—Rasdale got to his feet

before the disordered table, hiding it from her view—"this isn't the place for you, down with rotten mortals. Out riding the wind—"

She went to him and took him by the shoulders and smoothed his straggling hair.

"Razzy," she said quietly, "you've loved me all your life and I've loved you all of mine, and wherever you are is where I am coming to get you. The sooner you and I forget everything else and remember just those facts, the fewer complications there are going to be. And now"—she turned to Win again—"if you'll help to put her in Mell's car—"

"She—the key—she—"

"I'll get the key. You find the blankets."

Win did not wake as they wrapped her and carried her out. Livia tucked her in on the back seat, slid under the steering wheel, and wrapped her cloak around her arms again, prepared to start.

"I'll drive the roadster," Razzy volunteered, but his voice shook and through it Livia could hear his nerves clamoring for respite from responsibility.

"No, we'll leave it here," she said. And to cover his relief; "If I'm Brunhilde, I'm going home with my Siegfried across my saddle. But I should say I was not so much Brunhilde, as a damsel rescuing a gentleman in distress."

He tried to laugh but his voice broke. Her hand in its white gauntlet lay on the door of the car. He stooped to kiss it, and she laid her lips upon his head.

He looked up and caught her to him.

"I've—I've fought like the devil," he said, "but I'm licked. And oh, how glad I am—how glad I am!"

They both laughed as he went around to the other door and climbed in beside her.



# The Whirligig

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "Salvage Claims," "True to Form," etc.



## WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Johnny van Dusen, young society bachelor, who on the death of his father and the loss of his fortune was given a position in the office of Mr. Harper Olney, arrived to spend his vacation at Cedar Cliff, Mr. Olney's country place, during the absence of his hostess and her guests at the country club. Johnny looked forward with some suspense to the visit, as he was perfectly aware that Mrs. Olney, a kind-hearted matchmaker, had invited Sophy Milliken, daughter of the wealthy J. P. M., lumber king, for his especial benefit.

Johnny was met at the dock by Mogi, the young Japanese scientist who spent his summers studying dietetics and laying up funds as the Olney's butler. On the way home they succored a damsel in distress in a drifting launch. Later when he had changed into his bathing things Johnny saw, through a telescope on the porch, the same girl being pursued by a man on the island three miles away. He was dancing up and down with excitement and swearing softly to himself with rage, when Sophy Milliken, also in bathing togs, joined him and insisted on sharing the show. They saw the man take something from the girl. Almost before they knew what was happening, they were in the launch and on their way to her assistance. During the three-mile ride they became confidential, and suddenly Johnny found that he had proposed to Sophy and she had promised to give the matter her consideration.

On their return to the house, after seeing the girl—whom they discovered to be Mimi Shelton, an expected guest at Cedar Cliff—safely off the island, they were received by an amazed hostess, who found herself a little put out by the rate at which her plans were materializing.

## CHAPTER VI.

AFTER he had gone to bed Johnny lay awake for some time trying to determine whether or not he had fallen in love with Sophy Milliken, and, if so, what he was going to do about it. He did not go so far as to strain his imagination in trying to determine what Sophy might see fit to do about it.

To a young man of Johnny's position, the problem was a puzzling one. Sophy's prospective inherited wealth obtruded to complicate any clear decision. If Sophy had been a poor girl, Johnny would have dismissed the question of whether or not he was in love with her, because he had not the slightest intention of letting himself fall in love with a poor girl, or, if that could not be helped, of trying to persuade her to marry him.

Johnny had seen too many matrimonial catastrophes resulting from the marriage of young people, with a position to maintain and nothing wherewith to maintain it.

If, again, Sophy's fortune had been modest, but sufficient to hold up their corner of the social platform without its sagging perceptibly, Johnny was man of the world enough to feel that he would be paying his share in his ability to offer his wife a social atmosphere which she might otherwise never have enjoyed, and his children an inheritance of the best associations which the country had to offer. Incidentally, he would have done his best to make her a faithful and devoted husband—in other words, to make her happy.

But with the backing of such a for-

tune as J. P. M.'s and her own uncommon attractions. Johnny told himself that Sophy would be able to marry almost any man she chose. He had not missed the admiration she had excited at the dance. It seemed to Johnny that he had comparatively so little to offer in exchange as to be a negligible quantity. It mattered very little that Sophy had been born in a log cabin of the great north woods, that her father had started life as a lumberjack, while her mother was the daughter of a trapper of the Hudson Bay Company, because, after all, however humble the origin, her stock was of the pioneer breed. Johnny's own was Dutch patroon of the upper Hudson, and earlier than that, no doubt, Dutch nobility, as indicated by the Van.

But what now bothered Johnny was the futile effort to decide how much of Sophy's attraction for him lay in her vigorous loveliness and clear, strong qualities of mind and the kindness she had shown toward Mimi, and how much in the glamour of knowing her to be a potential heiress of great wealth. Johnny was no more a devotee of the golden calf than most young men of his class, nor was he an ardent worshiper of the fatted one. But a good deal of money had always been a necessity of his life, and lately he had not only suffered from the lack of it, but his attention had been focused on money in his business.

But Sophy's potential fortune was not the only complication in Johnny's effort to determine the basis of his sentiment. While he was thinking of Sophy, with her light gray eyes, Greuze complexion, and enticing smile, there kept thrusting itself into the picture another face, warmly tinted, with violet eyes, ripe, luscious lips, and curly, bobbed hair, not black as it had looked at first sight, but shot with rich, deep notes of color, and a body as lithe as a sea otter and the tones of a deep, dulcet, thrilling voice.

As he grew drowsier Johnny found

himself getting the two girls mixed, as sometimes happens to the unfortunates exposed to such a double, if not precisely allied, attack. Johnny's mind began to wander, finally straying off to dreamland, in which mysterious country they have a way of managing these problems.

He got up early in the morning, put on his own bathing suit, which had been laid out by Mogi, and went down for a swim. Rather to his surprise he found Mr. Olney, dressed for bathing, sitting on the rail of the veranda, smoking a cigarette and talking to Sophy, also in a bathing suit.

"Here's another," said Olney. "We've been waiting a few minutes to see how many real sports we're housing. Let's call it a quorum and go." He rose, and as they walked down the path to the steps, he went on: "Got an awfully pretty girl coming to-day. I've just been telling Sophy about her. She's the daughter of an old mining friend of mine named Shelton. For years he was a prospector with the usual ups and downs, principally the latter. He married the daughter of one of the old Spanish grandee families of southern California whose fortunes had all gone to pot. I saw her once a good many years ago, and when you see her daughter you'll understand where she gets her looks."

Johnny glanced at Sophy, who smiled at this confirmation of their surmises of the day before.

"Mrs. Shelton died about ten years ago," Olney continued, rubbing his big, muscular arms, "and poor old Shelton was in a train wreck down in Texas year before last. He got burned and blinded rescuing a friend, and he died a few months later. Mimi, his daughter, graduated this spring from an intensive course of chemical engineering and has some sort of wild idea of following in her father's footsteps."

"Prospecting?" asked Johnny.

Olney laughed.

"Hardly that," said he. "Assay work in the laboratory. Well, I suppose the field is open to anybody who can make good, but I don't believe she'll have to stick at it very long. Present company, of course, excepted, she's about the most potent youth restorer you can very well imagine."

Johnny thought there was as much truth as gallantry in the "present company excepted."

Sophy was wearing a different bathing suit—a most seductive type of bathing suit, with a snugly fitting jersey skirt. It was a deep purple, fitting closely about her small waist, with the skirt just above the knees, which were dimpled when she stood erect. Her stockings were rolled down to the point where there seemed absolutely no danger of their slipping, and the small ankles were laced into high bathing shoes which matched the suit.

"The water's still cold," Olney said, "so I shall take a very sketchy bath, and then beat it. Can't flirt with old Ma Rheumatism at my age, but you two can flop around as long as you like"—he smiled at them whimsically—"especially as you've established a precedent."

"Oh, come, Mr. Olney!" protested Johnny, "I thought that account had been ruled off."

"Well, then, open a fresh one if you like," said Olney. "Edna is old-fashioned about some things, but, having once expressed herself, she considers her duty done. It's all rot, anyway; we're not running a girls' school here—or, if we are, then we've got a snappy young corps of teachers. I learn something new every day."

He dived from the end of a float, Johnny and Sophy following. As they swam to the launch, lying to her moorings a little distance out, Olney passed them, plowing back like a seal at feeding time.

"This will do for my gargle," said he.  
5—Ains.

"Have a good time and don't get cross." And a moment later he bounded up the steps at a pace which few sedentary business men could have managed.

Johnny turned on his side to face Sophy, who was swimming easily a few yards away.

"Hope I'm as full of energy when I'm Mr. Olney's age," said he. "But I won't be, if I stick to an office desk. I suppose your father is something like Mr. Olney."

"My father," answered Sophy, "is about as different from Mr. Olney as it is possible for one man to be from another. He is built of oak and wire rigging; he speaks through his nose, and with no particular reference to grammar; when not on his good behavior, he chews tobacco, and, if particularly vexed with somebody or something, uses language that would blister the paint on a ship's side. He is like Mr. Olney in two respects, though: he's handsome and he's kind. If he weren't so weather-beaten, his features would be of the Grecian sort, perfectly straight and balanced, but with a heavier jaw."

"The highest ethnological type," said Johnny. "You inherited it, with something else from your mother. I suppose if I were to present myself to your father to ask for a job, he'd take it as a joke."

"I don't think so," Sophy replied. "Like most self-educated men, he puts more value on the trimmings than they're probably worth."

She reached for the mooring buoy of the launch and rested on it, while Johnny trod water slowly. Then he paddled to the launch, reached up for the rim of the half deck forward and hoisted himself aboard. Then Sophy, declining his assistance, did the same, to his considerable astonishment, for to raise one's self out of the water to an elevation of over eighteen inches is a gymnastic feat requiring unusual strength. But Sophy's long, round,

white arms performed it without any perceptible effort, and she seated herself at his side, smoothing her skirt.

"Not one girl in twenty could do that," Johnny observed.

"I guess I must have inherited some of dad's strength," said Sophy. "He can just about twist a horseshoe in two with his hands. Dad's full of surprises, and every once in a while he gives you one out of his box of tricks. He translated my diploma, and when I asked him where he got his Latin he told me that one winter when he was working up on the Canadian Line he broke his thigh bone, and while he was laid up he got a French priest to teach him. All of his fragmentary education was acquired in some such way, but he managed to assemble it as you might build up a motor, by adjusting a lot of odd parts."

"Your father sounds like a good deal of a man to me," said Johnny. "You must be crazy about him."

"He's the only man I've ever cared anything about," replied Sophy, "and I imagine he's pretty fond of me, though you'd never guess it to see us together."

"Well, you're lucky to have him," Johnny told her.

"You're thinking about Mimi Shelton," said Sophy, "and so am I. What chance has a pretty girl with no family, or money, in a world like this? It's like throwing a goldfish into the middle of a pickerel pond."

"If Mrs. Olney takes a fancy to her—" Johnny began, but Sophy interrupted:

"You seem to look on Mrs. Olney's favor as a sort of magic wand." Her tone was impatient. "I don't."

"Why not?" Johnny asked.

"Because I think her method is apt to make a girl discontented with what she's got. She says, 'Behold the glories of my exalted world. Marry into it and be one of us.' She doesn't take into consideration the fact that a girl might like her own world better."

"Then why should she be discontented?" Johnny asked.

"I mean," explained Sophy, "that she might be contented with her own until she gets a glimpse of Mrs. Olney's."

"Is that the way you feel yourself?" Johnny asked.

"Yes," admitted Sophy. "I was perfectly satisfied until I came here."

"But this world is quite within your reach," said Johnny.

"Perhaps it is," said Sophy, "but I'm thinking of Mimi Shelton. It might not be within her reach, and it seems to me that marrying what you want is a pretty poor way of getting it."

"It would be," said Johnny, "unless you married the one you wanted to."

"Well, even then it's a sort of unsatisfactory short cut. There's really only one way to enjoy what you get, and that's by earning it."

"Then let me tell you," said Johnny, "that most of the men and women who get it by marrying earn it."

"Is that the way you feel about it?" Sophy asked.

"Yes," answered Johnny, "but I'd try to earn mine in the shipyard."

"You seem to be banking a good deal on our silly talk of yesterday," said Sophy.

"Banking is scarcely the word," said Johnny. "Gambling would be a better one. But even if at the end of my apprenticeship you found me out and turned me down, I'd have a trade that I'd like a lot better than figuring up other people's profits and losses. Any bright son of a pawnbroker could do that better than I can. But I decline to admit that any of your shipyard gang could beat me at my job when I had the hang of it and was hardened down."

Sophy raised her eyebrows.

"I can't quite seem to see you in that sort of a job."

"A good many people couldn't quite seem to see some of us in the trenches, but the Germans did!" said Johnny.

"That's so," admitted Sophy. "Well, if you really want to tackle it, I'll ask dad to sign you on, though they've been laying men off recently. Do you?"

She turned her head, and her light gray eyes examined him with that intentness of expression which Johnny had previously remarked and which now gave him the same curious thrill. He met the look unwaveringly.

"Yes," he answered, "I do. Unless you tell me that there's no chance whatever of the Great Reward."

The delicate pink deepened in Sophy's cheeks.

"I'll let you know about that before I leave," she promised, and slipped over the side of the launch into the water. Johnny followed, and they swam back to shore and went up to the house.

## CHAPTER VII.

Mimi Shelton arrived a little before luncheon time. Johnny was presented to her with the other guests, and, though there was a flash in Mimi's violet eyes, she gave no other sign of recognition.

It was evident to Johnny that Mrs. Olney was considerably impressed by the vivid beauty of her new protégée. Her eyes went constantly to Mimi at table, and were not the only ones that strayed that way. Mimi was dressed in an engagingly simple silk frock. Johnny wondered if she had brought the spring-green, one-piece bathing suit, and what Mrs. Olney would say if she dared to wear it.

Mimi was rather silent at luncheon and afterward on the veranda, less from shyness, Johnny thought, than to get the lay of the land and adjust herself to her new surroundings. It was a Saturday and Olney was playing golf and lunching at the club. Sophy, whom Mimi appeared already to have fascinated, devoted herself to the new guest, and presently offered to show her about the

grounds. Johnny asked if he might go, too.

"Shall we let him come?" asked Sophy.

"Why not?" answered Mimi, and added demurely: "I think he's very nice." The way in which she trilled the "r" enchanted Johnny.

"If there's any question about it," he said, with a resentful look at Sophy, "I'll keep out."

"Then suppose you give us a chance to get better acquainted," Sophy answered, at which Johnny cheerfully withdrew. All things being equal, he thought it very possible that Mimi might find a more useful friend in Sophy than in their magnificent hostess.

He felt immediately thereafter, what was very rare for him, a little bored. The other members of the party appeared to have paired off to some extent, and Johnny did not know precisely what to do with himself. The day was cool, so he decided to go for a solitary ramble back through the pines and cedars, to explore what lay immediately beyond. Curiously enough, or perhaps naturally enough in America, where so few people walk for walking's sake and much prefer more rapid means of locomotion, Johnny, in his many visits to Cedar Cliff, had never been on foot beyond the reservations of the place itself. The time had all been taken up in pastimes on the grounds, tennis and swimming, boating and motoring, golf and teas and luncheons at the country club, or if the weather proved foul, bridge and pool, or billiards and dancing. So that it was quite a new idea of Johnny's, this poking about outside the limits of the Olneys' beautifully kept estate.

A footpath led through the dwarf pines and cedars, and a growth which looked strangely tropical for that latitude. Some distance beyond there were broad, cleared acres, belonging to a considerable country estate, at this moment closed.

Johnny set out on his exploring expedition in an abstracted frame of mind. His thoughts were principally of Sophy and the curious hostility which she seemed to feel for Mrs. Olney. This Johnny regarded as very bad form. And as he strolled along he decided that her point of view and cool action upon it, might be divided, like ancient Gaul, into three parts: the first of which was inheritance, the second, that independence to be found in pioneer stock, and the third, the conscious power of great wealth.

But what troubled Johnny more was the uncomfortable feeling that Sophy's brief commentaries on Mrs. Olney had colored his own sentiment for that kind and estimable lady. He could not help but wonder if possibly a great deal of what he had taken for granted as benevolence on Mrs. Olney's part might not be a sort of patronage and the liking for the pose of *Lady Bountiful*. Johnny began to wonder, also, if there was not some truth in Sophy's opinion that the discontent engendered in the bosoms of her young guests by this brief glimpse of luxury and what seemed to them a higher social life, might not more than outweigh the pleasure derived during their brief sojourn in it.

It struck him that possibly Sophy was the first to see Mrs. Olney's house parties in their true aspect, though she might not have done so but for the scrap of conversation unwittingly overheard at the country club.

These reflections were very disagreeable for Johnny, whose nature was a loyal one which gave instinctively both gratitude and friendship. Mrs. Olney had for some time been a sort of sovereign lady to him, a chatelaine whose patronage he had been proud to enjoy, as if he had been the squire of Olney, her dear lord.

Turning these things in his mind, Johnny began to wonder if perhaps a great deal of the devotion he had felt,

or thought that he had felt, for Mrs. Olney, was not a reflex of his affection for her husband, of whom he was really very fond. Harper Olney was a man who inspired not only the admiration, but the sincere liking of almost everybody with whom he came in contact. He was a thoroughbred, a sportsman, and, withal, a man of heart. Many customers whom he had carried through a crisis could testify to that.

These none-too-pleasant musings were interrupted by Johnny's sudden discovery of some tracks in a bare, sandy spot, where the cedars thinned to make a little clearing. Under most circumstances Johnny would not have noticed them, but in his meditative mood he had been walking very slowly, with downcast eyes. Even then the tracks would not have aroused his interest if they had not been going in his own direction, toward a gate in the fence which inclosed the estate. As Johnny followed them he became all at once aware of their marked peculiarity.

They were the tracks of a man wearing square-toed boots, and their spacing would have indicated to any boy scout that they were the tracks of a lame man, or one who had suffered some injury which had altered the proportion of his legs. There was a long step, about the regulation army step, alternating with a shorter one of about fourteen inches, and the toe of the foot that took this shorter step scuffed slightly as it was first lifted from the ground, leaving a grooved streak, such as one sees in footprints in the snow.

For a moment or two Johnny wondered idly what lame person had been walking about the cedar grove of the Olney place, and why a lame person should care to indulge in such a pastime. And then, as his consideration of the matter became more active, he stopped short, stooped down, and peered under the low branches ahead.

For it had suddenly occurred to

Johnny that when he had watched the most objectionable person pursuing Mimi, the day before, two things impressed him. One of these was the peculiar way in which her assailant had appeared to bound after her, like an ape or a gorilla, and the other was the slowness of his pace. It had seemed to Johnny that Mimi's pursuer could not have caught her at all, if she had not been unwilling to run past her boat. If, for instance, the man were as lame as the man who had made these tracks, Johnny doubted whether he would stand any chance at all of catching a vigorous and agile girl like Mimi, who could frisk away from him as easily as a nymph from a satyr. The simile struck Johnny as very apt.

Considerably excited over this idea, he stood peering under the trees for an instant, and, seeing nobody, started to follow the trail at a run. It was lost almost immediately, as the cedars gave way to scrub pines and the ground was carpeted by their fallen needles. But Johnny kept on toward the gate. He reasoned that if this were some prowler watching stealthily for Mimi, he had probably left the road at the corner of the fence, so he followed this until he came to the gate. If, indeed, he was a prowler, Johnny desired strongly to find him and have a few words with him.

After reaching the gate, he picked up the trail again in another little patch of sandy dust, and, still running, he made his way along the fence toward the road. There was a bit of underbrush and he could not see very far ahead. But when he had almost reached the road he heard the staccato exhaust of what sounded like a motor cycle, starting suddenly. Johnny increased his speed and came out on the road just in time to see a man on a motor cycle disappearing around a bend about five hundred yards away.

As it is scarcely worth while to pur-

sue a motor vehicle on foot—except in the movies—Johnny stood for a moment reflecting on what he had discovered. He no longer had the slightest doubt but that the prowler was the most objectionable person, and this individual now assumed a degree of objectionability rather more than merely annoying. It was serious enough that such a person should have menaced Mimi out on the little sandy island, but that he had informed himself so closely of her movements as to know that she had come to visit the Olneys, and had dared make his way here to slink about the premises, looked very sinister to Johnny, and was hard for him to explain.

An unprincipled man, infatuated with a girl, might take the chance of getting himself into serious trouble by molesting her on a little strip of sand out of range of human sight and hearing, where there could be—as it seemed to him—no possible witness. He might count on the girl not wishing to report the incident for the sake of her own reputation. But for him to carry his persecution to a country place like the Olneys', where there were a good many people about, would seem to indicate a determined purpose of some sort. Love, or its substitute in a brutal nature, was scarcely sufficient reason to warrant the risk run.

Johnny was perplexed and troubled. He walked slowly back, trying to make up his mind what he ought to do about it. What he had learned of Mimi Shelton's history and some quality in the girl herself had stirred Johnny's sympathy, and he felt a strong repugnance at saying anything to her which might mar the pleasure of her visit. It struck him, also, that there might be more in the affair than would appear from the little that he knew of it. The man might have some sort of hold or claim on Mimi that she urgently desired should not be known.

Before he reached the gate Johnny had decided to say nothing about it to

Mimi, for the present. But he made up his mind to tell Sophy, because he felt that Sophy was by way of becoming intimate with Mimi and might be made her confidant, and he had already conceived a very high opinion of Sophy's clear-headedness. He determined, also, to appoint himself a secret-service bodyguard for Mimi's protection, and to keep a vigilant eye on the premises. It struck Johnny then that in this duty he might find a valuable ally in Mogi, but he was not sure that it would be quite the thing to call the Japanese butler into requisition for the safeguarding of a guest. At any rate, he would take counsel on this point.

The opportunity of doing this came almost immediately, for as Johnny was walking toward the house he caught sight of Sophy and Mimi coming from the edge of the sand cliffs, where they had probably been enjoying the magnificent view, and, as Johnny hoped, exchanging confidences. At the steps of the veranda the two girls paused for a moment. Then Mimi went into the house, and Sophy, as if drawn by Johnny's glance, turned and walked slowly toward the grove of cedars flanking the Japanese garden, where he was standing.

### CHAPTER VIII.

Sophy was halfway across the garden, walking contemplatively with her eyes on the ground, before she caught sight of Johnny leaning against the gnarled trunk of a tree, the size of which was only to the knowing eye commensurate with its age. Mrs. Olney was very fond and proud of her cedars, which were gnarled and sinewed and twisted by winter gales into fantastic forms.

Sophy stopped and looked at Johnny with an expression which was not one of unmixed welcome.

"What are you in ambush there for?" she demanded.

"For you," Johnny answered, and

added with a levity that might have been better timed: "When the experienced hunter sees the antelope walking his way he does not stroll to meet it." And then, observing the expression of annoyance on her face, he went on quickly, "I want to talk to you about something rather important."

"Meaning yourself?" asked Sophy.

"No, I never felt myself to be important until a few minutes ago. It's about Mimi Shelton."

"Well, what about her?" Sophy asked.

"Come on into the Japanese house, and I'll tell you," Johnny replied.

Sophy hesitated for a moment, then, with a look of vexed resignation, complied with Johnny's request. They seated themselves on a bench screened from observation by the wattle side of the toy shelter, and Johnny, who sensed from Sophy's cold aloofness that she was out of humor about something, wasted no time in preamble, but told her what he had discovered.

This information produced an immediate and encouraging effect.

"There can't be any doubt about it," Sophy said. "Even looking through the telescope, I noticed how that beast seemed to bound after her and hop about like a chimpanzee."

"'Bounder' seems to be the name for him," said Johnny. "The English may have got the idea for the word from a sort of monkey manner."

"Too bad you couldn't get a close-up of him," Sophy said.

"I'll soon get one," declared Johnny, "if you can persuade Mimi to tell me who he is and where he can be found."

"I don't think she'd tell," said Sophy slowly. "I have an idea that there's more to this business than we think."

"That's precisely my opinion," Johnny agreed. "Though, of course, it's possible that he may be the sort of animal to get so crazy about her that he's a little off his chump."

"She's fascinating enough for almost

anything to happen," Sophy answered, "but somehow I don't believe it's that. I've got it into my head from the little she's told me that he's less after her than after something she's got."

"What did she tell you?" Johnny asked.

"About the same thing that she told us yesterday: that she'd accepted a few favors from a man she'd met down there in the oil fields, and that he'd followed her North, and bothered her in a lot of ways."

"Did she say anything about his being lame?" Johnny asked.

Sophy shook her head.

"No, she didn't seem to want to talk about him at all, and when she did her eyes got black, as if she were thinking about something pretty dreadful."

"Did you tell her what you told me—about that lumberjack?" Johnny asked.

"Yes," replied Sophy, and added with unconscious, but good, philosophy: "When you want a person to tell you something, the best way is to tell something about yourself first."

"And did you tell her the way you felt about Mrs. Olney?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Sophy sharply. "I didn't want to spoil her good time. Besides, I've got nothing against Mrs. Olney."

"Of course not," Johnny agreed, and added: "I've been thinking of what you said about her, too. But I believe you're too severe."

"Very likely," Sophy said indifferently. "I suppose it's hard for anybody to feel any great affection for a woman who's got everything she wants, and is perfectly and absolutely contented with it. That's enough to make anybody smug and self-satisfied."

"There you go again!" protested Johnny. "Who wouldn't have it if he could? If Mrs. Olney's got it, then so much the better for her. But you can't blame her for it."

"I'm not blaming her," said Sophy.

"But Mrs. Olney isn't what you got me here to talk about. If there's some sort of danger hanging over Mimi Shelton, the question is, what are we going to do about it?"

"Well, just for the present," said Johnny, "I'm going to kind of stay around and make it my particular business to see that this most objectionable person doesn't get a chance to be objectionable."

"You'd better watch your step!" warned Sophy. "He might become objectionable to you, too."

"I'll take a chance on that, so long as he's not objectionable to Mimi. But it may take some doing, and I thought I might swear in Mogi as a sort of deputy."

"The butler?" Sophy raised her eyebrows.

"Well, why not?" Johnny asked. "I've taken a liking to Mogi and I think he's a good sort. More than that, I'd be willing to bet he's a person of some importance in his own country. I've got a perfectly good hunch that Mogi's a gentleman in our sense of the word, as well as the Japanese, which, after all, means the same thing the world over; and I think that in an affair which had no international importance and didn't compromise him in any way, he'd act about the same as I would. He already knows about Mimi, and that this bounder started to bother her on the island and that we chased him away."

"Was he watching us through the telescope?" Sophy asked.

"No," answered Johnny. "I told him that much and asked him not to mention the fact that Mimi was the girl to whom we gave the gasoline."

"Then Mogi knows why we dashed off in the launch?" Sophy asked.

"Yes. I thought I might as well tell him, since Mimi was coming here," Johnny explained. "It's always a good thing to stand well with your host and hostess, but sometimes it's an even bet-

ter thing not to be misunderstood by the butler—especially when he happens to be the sort of man you can trust."

Sophy appeared to consider this worldly-wise statement. Then her mind turned immediately to something else, for she asked:

"Johnny van Dusen, when we were talking to Mimi yesterday on the beach of that island, did you notice that she was holding something in her hand?"

"Why, no," Johnny confessed. "I was looking mostly at her face."

"Well," said Sophy, "that's certainly worth looking at. But I noticed that while she was talking to us she never opened her right hand; then I looked closer and saw something shining between her fingers."

"Really!" Johnny exclaimed.

"Yes, she was holding something. You remember you said the man seemed to be tearing something from her hand. Perhaps he didn't get away with it, after all."

"And he's evidently determined to get it," said Johnny. He began to push a pebble about with the tip of his shoe. "What could it have been, I wonder?"

"Her father was a prospector, so it might have been a nugget," suggested Sophy.

Johnny shook his head, then asked: "Did it gleam like gold?"

"Yes," returned Sophy. "And it was pretty big, because her fingers didn't close entirely around it. But if it wasn't a nugget, then what was it?"

Johnny did some rapid thinking.

"It might have been a locket. Look here, Sophy, why not ask her? You needn't tell her anything about what I've just discovered."

"I'd rather have her tell me," said Sophy. "If she tells me of her own accord, she's apt to tell me a lot more, and, besides, that would put me in the position of being able to advise her. If you start to pry into a person's affairs it's apt to put him on his guard."

"That's so," agreed Johnny. "And there's certainly more in this business than appears at first sight. But do you think that she *will* tell you?"

"I've thought so right along," said Sophy. "I like Mimi Shelton, and I'm going to ask her to visit me when she leaves here. This man will be taking an awful chance if he tries to bother her where *I* live."

"He's taking a bit of a chance in trying to bother her here," said Johnny. "And that's what makes me think that his motive in doing it isn't altogether amorous."

"It's just possible," suggested Sophy, "that she might have some object of considerable value that he knew about, a family jewel, or perhaps one her father might have bought her when he was flush. She told me that she'd led a peculiar life of ups and downs, and that one year they might be living for a few months in the Palace Hotel, with a big car and saddle horses and things, and six months later she'd be washing her father's shirts in a cabin by the prospect he'd sunk all his money in."

"It's apt to be that way with prospectors," Johnny said. "They spend most of their time taking wealth out of the ground and getting it coined, and then pouring it back in again. Men like Mr. Olney are usually the only ones who make money out of it."

"Why don't you talk to her yourself?" Sophy asked. "She seems to think you're quite a wonder."

"Then she's pretty apt to be undecieved," said Johnny. "But I'll do it."

Sophy rose.

"Well, there's no use in our sitting here any longer." She glanced at the house. "That cat-eyed maid was looking out of the window a moment ago. I wonder if Mrs. Olney doesn't use her as a sort of house 'detective.'"

Johnny was a little startled at this voicing of his own suspicions, and inclined to resent it.

"I don't think that Mrs. Olney would stoop to detailing a parlor maid as a secret-service agent to watch her guests," said he.

Sophy gave him a cool look.

"Is that intended as a rebuke?" she asked.

"No," replied Johnny shortly. "Merely an observation. That sort of thing isn't done."

"Oh, isn't it?" asked Sophy, raising her chin. "I thought I heard you say something not long ago about requiring the same service from the butler."

"That's different," protested Johnny. "It's not to pry, but merely to protect a girl who seems to be in some sort of danger. If you think it's not worth while, I shan't say anything about it."

Sophy shrugged.

"Do as you think best," she said indifferently. "You've started in to run the show, so you might as well carry on."

She began to walk back across the garden and Johnny followed her. He felt a certain sense of injury. Instead of commanding him for his vigilance, Sophy appeared to be irritated about it.

"Do you want to play tennis?" Johnny asked.

"Yes, if you wish," returned Sophy. "Maybe Mimi would like to play. I'll go up and ask her." They crossed the garden, and Sophy entered the house. Johnny seated himself on the broad rail of the veranda, lighted a cigarette, and wondered why it was that a fellow, acting with the best intentions, should manage, through no fault of his own, to get himself discredited by doing so. He was destined to wonder a good deal more about the same thing within the next few hours.

#### CHAPTER IX.

"What do you think of Mimi Shelton, Johnny?" asked Olney after dinner, as they sat on the veranda railing enjoying a smoke.

"I think she's a peach, sir," Johnny

answered. "It's hardly worth while to say anything about her physical attractions; they speak for themselves."

"It's rather curious," remarked Olney, "that she and Sophy Milliken have lived practically the same sort of lives a few thousand miles apart, that is, up to the time when Mimi's father went broke and Sophy's made his pile. That sort of thing rarely happens in any country but this. Both of their fathers were pioneers, typical Americans, and strong, rugged men; and both were developers and producers. They were rather like my own ancestors several generations back, and now, by the luck of the game, Sophy has got about everything she wants within her reach and poor Mimi must get out and hustle for her chance."

"It doesn't seem quite fair," said Johnny.

"No," said Olney. "And it sometimes strikes me as not quite fair that I should have made such a lot of money out of the moderate amount I inherited. My ancestors earned theirs by making the first fine grade of writing paper. It has always seemed to me that the makers of necessary things, like paper or ships, or the finders of indispensable commodities, oil and coal and iron, are entitled to a lot more respect than those who have never made or found anything but money, especially men like myself, who make it by dealing in the probable value of things."

"I think you're a little rough on yourself," objected Johnny.

"Well, I hope so," said Olney. "Somebody's got to do it, I suppose—and it might as well be me. But it's a rotten business, Johnny. What you were saying yesterday about preferring to work in a shipyard gave me a lot of food for thought. I'd rather be making paper today, as my ancestors did, or building ships, than running the sort of business that I do, and it's a perfectly honest gambling business, as you know," he added whimsically.

"Well, sir," said Johnny, "what you say may be perfectly true, but it strikes me that you've suddenly got a dark slant on it. Everything is more or less a gamble and everybody likes to gamble one time or another, and if they can do it where they get a perfectly square deal, so much the better for them."

"The same old, everlasting argument," said Olney wearily. "But if you were my son, Johnny, I'd rather have you working for J. P. Milliken than in my office. I try to like the smarties who work for me, but I don't very much. No, Johnny, if you were my son I'd send you up to Milliken's yard in Bath. I think your idea is a very good one, cutting Sophy out of the circuit."

"Sophy isn't in the circuit, sir," Johnny assured him.

"Well, then, without thinking about Sophy, except as she might be instrumental in getting her dad to take you on, I'd do it, Johnny," advised Olney. "If you were a few years older, it would be a different matter, but you are still young enough to learn a craft. Down in the Street you're more apt to learn craftiness."

"Do you think it's worth while trying to learn shipbuilding without a technical education?" Johnny asked.

"Why not?" Olney demanded. "That's the way J. P. M. learned it, and he owns a controlling interest now. But you'd have to do as he did, and work up the technical side as opportunity offered. I might add that Andrew Carnegie learned the steel business that way and he's only one of thousands who have done the same thing, on a smaller scale. A boss is always ready to make concessions in time and service for an employee who is determined to get ahead."

Johnny thought of two or three young men in the office whose eyes were red-rimmed from midnight toil, but whose lethargy was often excused because Olney knew that they were taking night courses to fit them for better jobs.

"Do you think Mr. Milliken would give me a try-out?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Olney. "Best way to find out would be to ask him when he comes here to take Sophy home at the end of her visit. He'll give you the once-over, and tell you quickly enough about the sort of chance he thinks you might stand. Of course you'd get less money at the start than you draw from us, but then you wouldn't have to spend much."

Johnny thought a good deal about this proposition and it prevented his going to sleep that night with his usual ease. The weather had turned very hot and even on the top of that well-ventilated bluff the air was heavy and murky, though the night was not very dark because of a late moon somewhere behind the high opacity. Johnny's absorption in his own affairs had rather intruded on his interest in those of Mimi. He had not yet taken Mogi into his entire confidence, but he had located Mimi's room almost under his own, the bachelors being lodged at one end of the top floor. Johnny's window was wide open, though screened, of course, so that he could not lean out. The Olneys kept no dogs because two years before, when Olney had a fancy for breeding Aberdeen terriers, a case of rabies had broken out in the kennels, and the wanderings of two of the afflicted animals, until they were killed, had so disturbed the household that he had got rid of his stock, and, as he said, "gone out of the dog business for good."

Johnny now regretted this. It seemed to him that every isolated country place should have a corps of canine protectors, to give the alarm in case of a marauder.

"A perfect night for a crime," he thought, as he switched off his light and got into bed. It was dark enough to conceal the movements of a prowler, while yet light enough for him to see quite well what he was about. This re-

fection may have lingered in Johnny's subconsciousness, for at about two in the morning, he awakened with the distinct impression of having heard some sort of noise not normal in a sleeping household. He sat up in bed, and listened.

The silence then became oppressive. Not a breath of air was stirring, nor did the faintest lapping of waves come up from the beach below. Then, from far in the distance to the eastward, a fog siren wailed, though the air was fairly clear upon the high bluffs where the house was located.

For some moments Johnny listened tensely, trying to catch the slightest suspicious sound. He could not for the life of him have described what sort of noise it was he thought he had heard in his sleep, whether the opening of a window, or the crunching of gravel, or the sound of a voice.

After a few moments, as he heard nothing unusual, he slipped softly out of bed, his bare feet making not the slightest noise on the well-laid floor. He went to the window and, staring through the screen, could see only the vague outline of the tree tops against a sky scarcely less opaque, for the murk had thickened to obscure the anaemic moonlight. Then, as he stood there at the window, the faintest puff of warm, damp air was filtered through the screen, and Johnny detected, or thought that he detected, an elusive and peculiar odor.

At first he was unable to analyze this smell; in fact, it was scarcely a smell, rather a sort of vague, olfactory vibration. And yet there was to Johnny something unpleasantly reminiscent to it, just as there might be to the flavor or seasoning of some food stuff which once has made one sick.

Then it came a little more pronounced, though still puzzling, and, remembering a trick of bushmen or other aboriginal hunters, which somebody had once told him, Johnny dipped his finger in the

water of a little vase of flowers on the window sill and moistened his nostrils, then sniffed like a baffled hound. As a result of this, either because it gave a greater conductivity to a special sense terminal, or because he tricked himself into thinking this was the case, Johnny recognized immediately the strange, sickly, sweetish odor. As a little boy he had once gone in swimming too early in the season and got cold water in his ear, or some impurity, which necessitated a piercing of the drum, and the physician had given him a few whiffs of chloroform.

Why the smell of chloroform at this place and at this hour, Johnny wondered, and then he thought at once of Mimi's window, almost directly under his, of the attack upon her, and the man whom he had seen. He did not wait to ponder further, but, stealing softly out of his room, went down the stairs and along the hall to Mimi's door, where he rapped softly; then, getting no response, he tried the knob. The door was locked, but the transom over it was open. Johnny reached up for the rim and, with one bare foot on the knob, raised himself up. The room was plunged in darkness except for the dim light in the windows. He could see nothing. But instantly he detected a stronger odor of chloroform.

He let himself down, and rapped again. And, when he still got no response, he may have lost his head a little. He felt that at all costs, and with as little disturbance as possible, he should get into that room immediately. The transom was a fairly large one and gave enough room for a young man of Johnny's youthfully slender dimensions to slip through it, which he did, though not without ingenious scrambling. Then, when he was halfway through, he saw a dark figure bulking for a moment in the window, heard a thud and rustle outside as it dropped to earth.

Johnny was too far through the trans-

som to recede, so with some difficulty and with the aid of two strong, brass clothes hooks on the inside of the door, he struggled through and managed to land on the floor without mishap. He fumbled about, found the electric-light button, and switched on the light. Mimi was apparently sleeping profoundly, covered by a sheet, and with one bare arm half bent over her head. Her whole attitude suggested healthy and undisturbed repose, the deep sleep of tired youth. But it was evident to Johnny she would have been awakened by rappings at the door and scramblings over the transom, if she had not been well under the influence of an anaesthetic. He stepped quickly to her side, leaned over, and sniffed at her face, receiving instantly the smell of chloroform.

It occurred to him instantly that he had interrupted the intruder just in time, and, as Mimi appeared to be breathing easily, none the worse for the chloroform, he decided that he had better clear out with all dispatch before she happened to awake and see him there and possibly scream. Not wishing to leave her door unlocked on the inside and fearing that if he followed the thief through the window he might not be able to get into the house again, Johnny went back through the transom.

There came then a moment of indecision. Obviously he ought to send somebody to Mimi. It was out of the question to chase the thief, who must by now be well on his way. Johnny did not wish to alarm the house, or to have the affair known to anybody, expect, perhaps, Sophy, whose room was next to Mimi's, as Johnny knew from having seen her at the window. He rapped softly at Sophy's door.

For a moment there was no response. Then a girlish voice asked sleepily:

"Who's there?"

Johnny rapped again, more softly, not caring to proclaim his identity for the edification of any wakeful ears. He did

not think that Sophy was the sort of girl to take fright and scream, in which he proved to be right, for he heard a soft rustle as she slipped out of bed, then her voice against the crack of the door, not yet unlocked.

"Who's there?" she asked again.

Johnny whispered his name. There was a brief pause, and then a sibilant whisper:

"Are you crazy? What do you want?"

"Somebody has tried to chloroform Mimi Shelton," Johnny whispered back. "I smelled the stuff."

Sophy slid the bolt, and opened the door slightly.

"What's that?" she asked quickly.

"My room's just overhead," explained Johnny. "A noise awakened me, and I went to the window and smelled chloroform. I climbed over Mimi's transom and as I was crawling through a man dropped out of her window. Then I switched on her light. She seems to be all right enough, but pretty well doped. She didn't wake up. You'd better go to her."

Sophy nodded.

"Yes," she whispered. "Our rooms have the same bath and I can go right through."

Johnny went back to his room. He realized suddenly the risk that he had taken, first in climbing into Mimi's room, then in rapping at Sophy's door. He congratulated himself on having managed it without detection. And then, just as he was closing his own door, he heard the faint click of a latch at the far end of the hall which ran the whole length of the upper story.

## CHAPTER X.

Naturally unable to sleep, Johnny stood by the window listening intently for some sound which might reassure him as to Mimi's condition.

He was overwhelmed with self-dis-

gust at having managed the affair so badly and at the risk of compromising Mimi. If he had only thought of the connecting bathroom, he might have rapped first at Sophy's door, rushed through, and tackled the marauder, but then, although fairly familiar with the house, he had not known about the bathroom. He was also a little comforted by the reflection that perhaps it might be better on the whole for Mimi that matters had gone as they had.

Johnny reflected that Sophy was a level-headed girl and would do what was necessary without making any fuss about it. Then, impatient at his limited scope of observation, he managed to slide out the screen without undue noise. He leaned far out the window, listening. The murmur of voices came presently to reassure him and, as there were evidently two voices conversing quietly enough, Johnny felt no longer any great alarm in regard to Mimi. Her peaceful, undisturbed position had shown that her molester had evidently crept in the window without awakening her and, with a handkerchief or bit of gauze saturated with chloroform, had succeeded in getting her quickly under its influence without a struggle.

Johnny arrived at two conclusions about this most objectionable person. He was evidently a desperate character, but one of no great courage. He had bothered Mimi on the island, then fled at the approach of a man and a girl in a launch. He had sneaked about the premises, and beaten a hasty retreat, no doubt, on catching sight of Johnny walking across the garden. His daring to enter Mimi's room, which he might have located by seeing her at the windows, led Johnny more than ever to suspect that he counted to a great extent on Mimi's unwillingness to raise the alarm, even in the event of danger to herself. The scoundrel must have some sort of hold on Mimi, Johnny thought, and he hoped now, after what had hap-

pened, that Mimi would take Sophy into her confidence. Johnny could scarcely wait for the coming of morning and a chance to talk with Sophy.

But though ardently desiring to know the inside workings of the puzzling affair—not only out of a natural curiosity, but in order that he might be able to serve Mimi with more efficiency—he was quite unprepared for the startling abruptness with which his wish was to be gratified. Having listened for a few moments to the low murmur of voices, he was about to replace the screen and go back to bed again, when he heard his name called in low tones. He looked out and saw Sophy's golden head and creamy shoulders thrust through the window beneath and reflecting the light which streamed out of it.

"Johnny—Johnny van Dusen!" she called softly.

"What's up?" asked Johnny.

"Come down here quietly. We want to talk to you."

"All right!"

Johnny slipped into a bath robe and, pausing to listen a moment at his door, crept softly down. Mimi's door was slightly ajar. Sophy opened it to let him in, then closed it silently behind him.

Mimi was sitting up in bed, a silk scarf thrown about her shoulders, and the pallor of her face accentuated by the brilliancy of her eyes, which were a deep sapphire from her mental agitation. Sophy, in a silk kimono, looked no less excited.

"We can talk here, if we talk quietly," she said. "There's nobody next door, and your room is directly overhead. Mimi's told me all about it. The very worst has happened. He's managed to get away with it."

"Get away with what?" demanded Johnny.

"The most valuable thing that Mimi owned. Her whole future fortune."

Glancing at Mimi, whose beauty at that moment had about it some un-

earthly quality, Johnny might have questioned the truth of this statement, if he had cared to waste the time in idle argument.

"Well, what was it?" he asked.

"A locket she wore," said Sophy excitedly. "You see he wasn't interested in Mimi; he was after something that she had, the value of which it's absolutely impossible to estimate. Oh!" she cried impatiently. "If you had only come right to my door instead of floundering over that transom we might have caught him."

"We might catch him yet," said Mimi, "but we'll have to be pretty quick about it. I know where he's stopping, and the chances are he'll count on my keeping my mouth shut rather than make a scandal for myself, so he may take his time about getting away. But I don't think he'll take very much time."

"Is it far from here?" asked Johnny, who was doing some rapid thinking.

"No," replied Mimi. "About three miles, I should think—near the steam-boat landing. It's a sort of showy beach hotel."

"I think I know the place," said Johnny. "Is it the Seaview Hotel?"

Mimi nodded.

"Yes," said she. "That launch he was in day before yesterday belongs to the hotel. If we could get there right away, we might be able to bluff him into giving up my locket. But I haven't any right to drag you and Sophy into this."

"It strikes me we're already in," observed Johnny dryly. "Now, I'll tell you what we can do. We can get dressed and slip quietly out of the house, go to the garage, wheel the little car out on to the road, and beat it for the Seaview Hotel. If we have any luck, we can make this thug hand over the locket and get back before anybody's stirring."

"But suppose we don't?" asked Mimi. "What would the Olneys think of you and Sophy?"

"I don't care what they think," de-

clared Sophy. "Besides, Mrs. Olney thinks it already, and if the worst comes to the worst, we can tell them what it's all about." She looked at Johnny. "Can we get into the garage?"

"Yes," said Johnny. "The key's in the coat closet."

"Then let's get busy," said Sophy. "You run up and dress, and we'll be out there as soon as you are."

"It's a bet," said Johnny, and departed.

As he was dressing himself in the manner of a fire-engine horse being harnessed, it occurred to Johnny that, wild as their immediate plan might appear, it was really under the circumstances the only thing to do. Everything depended on their catching the thief before he left his present location. Johnny thought he might be persuaded to give up his loot, if he were informed that one witness had seen him crawl out of Mimi's window, and two were able to testify to his use of chloroform. The questionable part about the affair was why Mimi, who had known of his intentions all along and had been attacked by the man before, should not have denounced him and had him placed under arrest or bond or something of the sort. But Johnny thought the explanation of this might be forthcoming as soon as there was time.

This surmise proved entirely correct. The two girls came silently to the garage where Johnny was waiting. Then, all three of them being athletic young persons, they quickly rolled Mr. Olney's smart little car out of the grounds, where a gentle declivity sped it on its way for about a quarter of a mile. Johnny, entirely familiar with this car, was in the driver's seat, the two girls sharing the one beside him.

"Now," said Johnny, letting in the clutch and kicking up the motor, "would you mind telling me what all this is about, if only in a brief and sketchy way? To begin with, what is the especial sort of treasure we are out to recover?"

"It is a thin, flat, gold locket, with a little diamond set in the middle of it," Mimi answered.

"A thin, flat, gold locket," Johnny repeated. "That could scarcely hold the 'Sultana,' or the great ruby of Ceylon. What was in it, a ten-thousand-dollar bill?"

"If you had said a ten-million-dollar bill, you'd be guessing a little nearer," Mimi answered. She hesitated a moment, then added: "It's a formula."

"A formula for what?"

"The formula for a solution to fill a sort of pendulum for locating oil."

Johnny gasped. He had heard vague rumors, more or less serious, of such a device being used by oil prospectors, but he had thought of them as belonging in the same category as divining rods, ouija boards, crystal balls, and other accessories of spiritualistic phenomena. He would never have believed that any sane person, or, to put it more mildly, any person of good sound sense, would be willing to back such a chimerical device with real money, or would risk his life or personal liberty in repeated efforts to steal the formula for the contents of such a dubious invention.

Mimi may have guessed what was passing in his mind, for she said:

"It may sound wild to you because you don't happen to know that this sort of thing has been used successfully by some of the biggest oil companies, and that two of them at least are at this very moment paying enormous salaries to 'locators,' who are using them to verify geological reports. This particular one of mine has served to locate fourteen wells which were brought in successfully, without a miss, by the man who gave it to my father. It has never failed to bring in a paying well when the drilling was carried down to the depth limit."

"Have you proof of that?" Johnny asked.

"Positive!" Mimi answered emphatically. "More than that, father used it

himself to condemn a good many locations that showed dry holes later on."

Johnny asked the obvious question:

"Then why didn't your father bring in a well with it?"

"Because he died of burns received in a gas explosion before he was able to get the financial backing to drill a test well on certain places he had located."

"Do you know those locations?"

"Yes," said Mimi. "And so does the man who stole the formula, but he would need the apparatus to convince any capitalist he might try to interest."

"Have you got a copy of the formula?" Johnny asked.

"No," replied Mimi. "Father gave me this when he knew he couldn't live, and I've worn it in the locket ever since. That may sound foolish, but I did not think anybody knew I had it. I thought this man was following me about for a different reason. The first time I suspected what he was really after was two days ago on the island. I meant to tell Mr. Olney all about the invention, and try to interest him in it. Father's dying words to me were: 'See Olney and tell him all about it; he'll give you a square deal, and if he takes it up it will mean an enormous fortune'—and now I've lost it." She gave a choking sob.

Johnny was impressed despite his doubts.

"How did this man happen to give it to your father?" he asked.

"He was in a train wreck," explained Mimi, "and father managed to drag him out and save him from burning to a crisp. Father was hard up at the time and working for him as driller. Just before he died the man gave father the formula. A few days later father died. The man had already made an enormous fortune for all his relatives and friends. The chances are that if he had lived he would have staked father to bring in a well, or he might have willed him something, if he had known that father was going to collapse so soon."

"Then," said Johnny, "as the case now stands, your locations are not worth much without the apparatus to verify them, and, even if you have that, you'll have to find the capital to finance the drilling operations. But if this fellow gets away with it, he might beat you to it."

"That's it exactly," Mimi said. "The only chance we've got is to catch him before he gets away."

"And before he has time to make a copy," added Johnny.

Mimi nodded.

"Yes, but even if he made a copy I might beat him to it, provided I could raise the capital in time."

"You haven't got the leases on these locations?" Johnny asked.

"No, but I don't think that part would offer any difficulty, as the nearest proven field is about eighty miles away. The man who gave father the formula spent four months prospecting with this 'Whirligig,' as he called it, and he told father that this location gave the strongest reaction he had ever seen with it."

Sophy had remained a breathless listener to the dialogue, but she now interrupted to ask:

"How much money would it take to drill a well down there?"

"You'd have to count on fifty thousand at least," said Johnny, who knew something about oil ventures. "Maybe more at the present cost of things. Call it seventy-five thousand in order to have a margin."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," said Sophy. "If we can get this formula, I'll finance it myself."

"Could you?" asked Johnny.

"Yes," returned Sophy. "Or at least I am sure I could persuade my father to. He's a good deal of a plunger, and he's never yet refused me anything I've asked. You see, unlike most fathers, he's got a good deal of respect for my common sense. Besides, he's wanted to get in the oil game for a long time."

"If you could manage that," said Mimi, "I'll tell you what I propose: we'll make it a syndicate of three on equal shares."

"Oh, come! I've got nothing to put into it," protested Johnny.

"It strikes me you have put it in already, Johnny van Dusen," Sophy said. "If you hadn't seen this man's attack on Mimi through the telescope and rushed over in the launch, he'd probably have got the formula then. And if you hadn't been on watch to-night, there'd be no chance of our catching him now—and when it comes to that, you've still got a job ahead of you."

"That's so," assented Johnny, who was driving fast, but carefully. "I wish I had a gun."

"So do I," said Mimi. "I'd have carried one myself, if I hadn't been such a fool as to think he was following me because he was so crazy about me."

"Well, that might have had a lot to do with it, too," said Johnny.

"How do you think he guessed you were carrying the formula with you?" asked Sophy.

"The chances are," said Mimi, "that he heard of its having been given to father, or that father may have told him he had it. They'd been more or less associated down there in the oil fields, and father thought he was on the level. So did I, at first, but it wasn't long before I discovered my mistake. He must have guessed that father gave me the formula before he died. Then one day when I was wearing a blouse which was open at the throat he saw the chain and twatched up the locket before I could stop him. I was so startled and angry that I may have given away the secret. He pretended to think it held the portrait of some beau, and to be jealous. It fooled me at the time, but I believe now that he had a perfectly good idea of what was inside."

Johnny was doing some rapid thinking. They were now not more than a

mile from the steamboat landing near which was the garish hotel, with its beach casino and bathing pavilion. It seemed to Johnny that in a situation as serious as this had become, they ought to take no chances on their prey's escaping. The man was very likely armed, and Johnny was weaponless, and with only the doubtful support of two young girls. But there was one point which still needed clearing up.

"Would it do you any harm, Mimi," he asked, "if there was to be a row and a lot of publicity about this business?"

"Yes," Mimi admitted. "It would probably be the finish of my reputation."

"Why?" asked Sophy.

"Because I've acted like a fool," said Mimi. "I was actually engaged to this man for about three months before I found out about him, and I owe him quite a lot of money. Father had scarcely anything when he died, as he had put his savings in holdings which I could not realize on, and I wanted to finish my course and try for some sort of position. I borrowed even more from him because I had the formula and hoped to interest Mr. Olney, or somebody else."

"How much do you owe him?" Sophy asked.

"About fifteen-hundred dollars. You can easily understand that if it were known that he'd been financing me all this time, it would look pretty bad."

Johnny immediately abandoned his half-formed idea of calling in the assistance of the hotel detective, or the local police. But he was unable to see just how they were going to recover the formula in the room of such a hotel as the Seaview, at half past three of a summer morning, without a good deal of publicity. At any rate, it was no job to drag Mimi and Sophy into. Johnny's decision was taken immediately. He would have to play the game alone, and play it principally on bluff.

"What's the fellow's name?" he asked.

"Jake Wessengin," answered Mimi. "He's lame, isn't he?"

"Yes. His thigh bone was broken by a bullet some years ago and it has knitted badly, but he's strong as a bull."

"Well," said Johnny, speaking rapidly, for they were drawing near the place, "when we get there you two girls must sit in the car, and I'll go up and interview Jake, if he hasn't already beat it. I don't believe he has, though, because it is more than likely that he counts on Mimi's saying nothing and coming to some sort of terms with him."

"What sort of terms?" asked Sophy.

"I think he'll offer a proposition for a half interest—and a life partnership," returned Johnny dryly.

"That's what I'm afraid of myself," Mimi admitted. "Now that he's got the formula, he may think I'll give in."

"Well, we'll soon know," said Johnny, and, as a turn of the road brought into sight the big hotel, he drove the little car into a grove of trees which flanked it, then stopped the motor and got out.

"I don't see how you're going to manage anything alone," said Sophy.

"I have a plan," Johnny told her, "but I've got to be alone to pull it off. I don't think there'll be a scrap. If my scheme works, I'll be back here with the formula in half an hour. If it doesn't, then you'd better drive back before the household is stirring, slip in quietly, and wait there till you hear from me."

"I don't like it, Johnny," objected Sophy.

"Neither do I," said Mimi. "I tell you he's a very dangerous man. I don't like it one bit."

"Well, I do, and I think my plan is going to work," said Johnny, adding: "Don't wait more than half an hour."

And, ignoring further protests, he walked rapidly toward the hotel.

# Mortmain and Celia

By Bernard Rosny



YOU have had an interesting life," observed Doctor Fames, as he laid down the book. It was a massive volume bound in morocco, and Mrs. Derwin called it her Memory Book. "Those autographs now. A most unusual collection. I like the way you have them arranged—the pages cut in groups, some longer than the others, so that you can see several of those distinguished names without turning the leaves."

"That is the birthday-book part," Mrs. Derwin explained. "The groups are according to the weeks. If you were born on the first of a month you're at the top; if on the seventh, or the fourteenth, or so on, you're at the bottom. Oh, doctor, how evasive you are! Why will you go on talking about trifles instead of answering my plain question?"

Doctor Fames wrinkled his honest, middle-aged face. To answer that plain question was what he plainly dreaded.

"How much longer do you give me, doctor?" She held him with an iron determination. It was extraordinary, he told himself, how her nervous energy lasted. Her thin, worn body was taut. The hands that grasped the arms of the wheel chair did not support her; they merely emphasized the command, almost the threat, with which she spoke.

"Now there is no necessity for you to worry," he began, with the gentle amenity that had helped to build one of the most fashionable practices in New York. "There is no need for alarm yet."

"You don't understand." The deli-

cate, blue-veined hands rose, and slapped down irritably. "I must know. You've never realized me, doctor. I'm not one of those fool women who have to be soothed and coddled into death, as if it were a spoonful of disagreeable medicine. I don't have to be petted into taking it. You needn't sugar-coat it for me. In the first place, I don't *believe* in death. It's only a phase. I'm sure that I'll be able to stay somewhere around this plane. How you can doubt that after the manifestations that come over, I can't imagine. You don't suppose that I'm afraid? Besides, I have to make certain arrangements." She smiled. "I can't die all in a minute as one goes out and leaves a disordered room. I'm a methodical person."

The doctor tapped the book uncertainly. To buoy the patient until the end generally ameliorated, and sometimes actually retarded, the end. When she smiled like that he remembered how pretty and charming a woman she had been, and what a gallant fight she had made to remain charming. Once his own wife had observed, "I can't help respecting Irene. If I had a hopeless disease it would never occur to me to put aigrettes in my hair and read foreign journals. She always keeps up."

The piercing, deep-sunk brown eyes bored through him.

"Be a sport, doctor, and treat me like one. How long? A year?"

At his silence she drew a ragged breath, cut in the middle. So it was even worse than she had thought.

"Six months—with care, living like a hothouse plant—not exciting myself?"

"Yes," said Doctor Fames slowly.

She closed her eyes.

"Thank you," she said faintly. "It's so much better to know. You see, it might have been next week."

"You haven't been suffering much?"

"No. And my hand has been almost abnormally active. I'll have another story ready soon, quite a good story. I'll send it to you when it comes out."

"Don't overwork," he cautioned kindly.

"Work doesn't hurt me. Work doesn't hurt anybody who loves writing. It's worry that takes it out of you," she added, with a touch of bravado. "Now I won't. And Miss Wainwright takes so much trouble off my hands. She's not only my secretary, but she manages the housekeeping when I'm not up to it. The servants like her, which makes it easier."

"Oh, everybody likes Celia Wainwright," said the doctor comfortably.

His wife had secured the treasure for Mrs. Derwin. As he rose she detained him with one of her slight gestures that had yet all the rebellious force of an order.

"Before you go, won't you give me that prescription again for the sleeping powders? I've been sleeping wretchedly. And—it's hard."

He hesitated. Then he reflected on the brief space that this woman had to live, and on her pluck. No danger of her forming a habit.

"Remember," he said, as he handed her the slip of paper, "don't increase the dose without consulting me. There's something tricky and unaccountable about this stuff. There's a percentage of fatalities even with ordinary care."

"I'll use extraordinary!" Her smile flashed again. "You told me all that last time. Thank you. Good-by, doctor."

When he had gone the mask fell. She sat, absolutely still, gazing through the

window that opened on the balcony. The plants had been moved to either side so that she could watch the current that moved up and down Park Avenue. It gave her the warm feeling that she was still of the world, the fallacy of activity. Now, however, it was like a torrent of irony flowing past, ignoring her. Life had killed and buried her. If it only knew, there was in her a vindictive and unquenchable protest that was absolutely alive.

Six months! At least it would be spring and summer—that much to the good. The time of growing things, the time of young awakening and mellowing growth. The time of love.

Suddenly a new sensation pierced her, so strange, so antagonistic to what she had been feeling, that her eyes widened. Entirely unlooked for, the wish stabbed her that, instead of having six months more to live, she had died six months earlier!

She had made up her mind, then, that it was true? She was going to face facts? Her reason had capitulated, instead of fighting for deception. That was the worst of being a woman of brains. Your mind refused to be hoodwinked. It worked on independent lines, and some day set the appalling results before you. And there was no appeal.

If she had died six months ago, she would have died sure of Ralph's love.

The very worst circumstance of her ill health had been that it made him unhappy. It was hard on a man to have an invalid wife. No one had ever suspected the courage that her obdurate will had needed, to make her dress and go with him to the theater, or to places where one must talk and smile and play the social farce that the next person was amusing. Later, when this became impossible, she had at least kept the air of the hospital out of his house.

This was not to be accounted to her for righteousness. It was self-defense. Such an air would have driven almost

any man out of it. Ralph was a dear, but he was human. She had never discouraged a moderate cultivation of the cult of the club and of the purely masculine side of life, on his part. She knew that, had nothing better offered, there was in her a fierce sense of possessiveness that would have taken a grim satisfaction in chaining him to her side, even against his will. But things were not as bad as that. He wanted to be with her; he liked to talk over anything that sifted through his sound, if somewhat unagile, mind.

She had never concealed from herself that she was of a jealous temperament. Marriage had crystallized the passionate love of her girlhood, instead of reducing it to the usual moderation. Even her work was subordinate. She was a fairly successful writer of stories, but she was less artist than woman.

The single compensation that her enforced quiet had brought was more time to give to her work. Her mind had even gained clarity, her intuitions had become more daring in accosting those problems of human nature in which the best discoveries of the story-teller are made. Only her physical powers had lagged. And that had brought Miss Wainwright, with the most attractive of recommendations: one year's work as a secretary since leaving college, alert and intelligent, and such a pleasant person to have about the house.

She had taken Celia just about six months ago.

If she could only have died then—without knowing, without dreaming of what was to come!

She turned with a smile as the door behind her opened. She knew Ralph's way of opening a door as she knew his footstep, or his kiss of greeting. That kiss was one of her greatest tortures. Time after time, instead of flowing to meet it, to lose herself in it, she held aloof and appraised it. Was it becoming formal, a good-natured habit?

Worse, was it unwilling? Did he dislike kissing her; did he force himself to go through with a bit of chivalrous pretense?

"Well, Rene, how are we to-day?" he inquired. That was one of the dear absurdities about him; his unimaginative way of always asking the same thing. It was like the all-over brown of his hair.

"Pretty well." She braced herself to play the comedy of two settled married people without a cloud between them.

"How's the story getting on?"

"Practically done. Though I may change the end. I may reward the innocent, and punish the guilty."

He met this with his robust laugh.

"Rather old-fashioned for a modern like you, isn't it?"

"I don't know," she answered thoughtfully. "The innocent may escape reward, but it seems to me that most people are punished in some way." She brushed aside the cynical mist, and asked: "Why are you home to lunch?"

"Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Idiot!"

He patted the thin, still beautiful hand.

"Found I had to come back for some papers. Couldn't do without them."

She was silent. He had been coming home for lunch with unusual frequency of late. As for the papers, a clerk might have been sent for them, as had been done before. A woman less cankered by suspicion would have put his presence down to anxiety about herself. She dismissed that.

He got up and wandered about the room, fingering books and flowers, and talking inconsequently. Gossip about their friends, political and stock-market news, stories, anything. She took her vanity box from the table, and held it in her lap. The lid was lined with a good-sized mirror, and she tipped it delicately, following his progress. Even now it gave her a deep, absorbing sense of happiness to watch him. He was a

large, handsome, solid type, who moved with the ease and precision of a man built for outdoor sports. The slight inexpressiveness of his face and its obstinacy went with the firm beauty of line.

"By the way," he said abruptly, "old Wainwright came to-day, and tried to sell me some stocks." When I told him they were not in my line—altogether no good, they were—he asked me to lend him a considerable sum of money."

"Of course you didn't."

"You're a mind reader! Finally he came down to a small loan. I let him have that. I'm afraid it isn't what you call a happy home. No wonder the girl doesn't seem keen about holidays."

"I shouldn't have anything to do with him," said Irene warmly. "They're a bad lot. Mrs. Fames told me that his wife left him in quite a disgraceful manner, and that you couldn't blame the poor woman as much as you ought to, because he was so impossible. One reason I was glad to take Celia was that I think when a decent person rises above such surroundings, she ought to be encouraged." She forced herself to speak naturally. "They're really a good family, too. It's a shame."

With a murmur of reply he opened the door and sauntered into the next room. The click of a typewriter became audible through the opening.

The woman in the wheel chair looked after him. She could move her chair across the floor, and she did so noiselessly until, screened by the door, she could look into the room beyond. It was the first time in her life that she had done such a thing. She brought the chair up with its back toward the door, and again took up the box on her lap. She had to be careful to hold it so that the mirror should not flash in the morning light.

The room she saw in the glass was furnished as half boudoir, half study. The one wide window was hung with

net curtains, and over them, but drawn back to the sides, were hangings of China-blue silk, embroidered with iris. Magazines and papers were piled on the carved bookcases. A filing cabinet was dissembled behind another blue hanging. By the window a girl sat, busy at a typewriter.

She was a pretty thing, in the early twenties. There was nothing of the business woman about her, except a certain sleekness of outline and restraint of gesture. Conciseness and efficiency were not the first things you thought of when you looked at her. Perhaps charm was. She was appealing, rather than beautiful, and she had an air of inexperience that made men feel protective.

She returned the greeting of her employer's husband with a smile that was shy and elusive and, as it were, born in spite of herself. Both figures were in profile to the watcher, as he stopped and put his hand on the table. For a moment the girl shuffled some papers; then she gave up the pretense of being unaware of his nearness.

"I saw your father to-day," he began pleasantly.

With an effort she raised her head.

"Mr. Derwin, I want to ask you something. Please—don't give father any money."

"How did you know I had?" The words were merely kind, but they had a stirred and significant background. It was as if the man had said, "At last we are getting intimate. We can be ourselves."

"Have you? I'm so sorry. Oh, Mr. Derwin, I hate to say this. It seems so disloyal. You don't know how it makes me feel. But you mustn't—you mustn't."

"I was very glad to, my dear child. It was only a loan."

"You don't know." A painful color flooded her pale, flawless skin. The voice was obeying only the driving power of the will. "He'll take advantage.

He'll want more, as long as you will let him have it. And he'll never pay it back, never. I couldn't speak about him, if it were any one else but you; but you—you've been so good to me. Both of you. Oh, why did you do it?"

"I did it because I thought it might make things easier for you in your home. Surely you know that."

"Yes!" cried the girl. "He counted on that!"

"There is nothing in the world that I wouldn't be glad to do for you."

Celia gazed up at him. Then she began to weep, without any attempt at concealment. With an inarticulate sound of pity and yearning, he gathered her into his arms, hiding her face against his. It was as if his power of resistance, grown thin by long endurance, had gone down; as if the vehement movement had been shocked out of him.

Irene noiselessly wheeled herself to her old position on the other side of the wide room. She was hardly there before the door shut very unobtrusively. She did not want to see any more. She did not need to witness further avowals or reiterated caresses. Did she not know the meaning of every intonation, every gesture of Ralph's? It was enough. She was certain.

Life had killed and buried her. She was nobody, even to her husband. As soon as the physical shell had been got rid of, and a decent interval had elapsed, he would marry Celia. They couldn't keep apart, even now. And at the thought an overwhelming rush of denial filled her.

He should not. Rather any one than Celia. It would not be half so bad, so poignant, to fancy him with some unrealized, strange woman, as with this girl whom she could imagine in every detail. Her vivid mind gave the coming horror the immediacy and the edge of reality. It was a torture. She was ready to pick up any weapon to prevent it.

Any weapon?

In that other room, on the other side of a partition, they were probably in each other's arms.

Gradually she grew quite calm. She recognized the mood that was coming over her, a mood of withdrawal from actual circumstances. In its absorption it approached hypnosis. There was the sense of conflict, the necessity of solving a problem so that she might be at rest; but there was also the certainty of being up to the conquest, the dependence on some storehouse of power. It was the mood in which her best intellectual work had been done.

Her brain was working it out as if it had been a story. All she had to do was to wait, in that strangely cold and expectant detachment, until she was told what she had to do.

The flowers on the balcony, primroses and thick, stocky hyacinths with ringleted petals, and the window-box row of green, were like dead blobs and streaks of color. The sound of the street became a homogeneous murmur.

After a while she put out her arm, as if in obedience to an order, and lifted the big Memory Book from the table near her, sliding it to her lap. It ought to have a full life inside it, it was so heavy. She found the place that she wanted: the birthday section, April. Yes, it could be done. The question was, what price was she willing to give?

You could get almost anything for a price. Except love. Yes, but you could thwart love, deflect it, destroy it. You could have some power left. What was she willing to give for that power?

Anything. Her life? Those last six months into which what she had left of life would be boiled down, concentrated? After all, what would they be? Suffering, certainly. And more than physical suffering, the vision of the growth of that young love that accorded so well with the spring. She would see it, as a gardener sees an alien, poisonous weed

creep over and blot out his cherished plants. A weed that had no right in her garden, except the ineluctable right of youth and vitality.

She had told the doctor that she expected, after death, to keep somewhere near this plane; which, in her case, meant that she could not imagine a state of being in which she would be utterly separated from Ralph. She would know about him. No power could keep her away from Ralph. And it would be like watching that scene in the next room, over and over, always.

Yes, she would pay the six months. If she came back, she would not find them together. And if she sank into a dreamless sleep, that would not be so bad, either. She was so hungry for sleep.

When Celia came in after lunch with a pile of typed sheets she found that Mrs. Derwin had made one of those sudden changes of mind that kept the secretarial position from being altogether a bed of roses.

"The end of the story won't do, Celia. It isn't consistent with the character. *Conchita Daré* would never have lived on so comfortably after knifing her rival. She had a conscience; I've made that clear. I believe the best climax would be a letter to *Juan*, confessing the crime. You know she was fond of letter writing. What do you think?"

Celia answered, all the more full of eager sympathy because her own conscience was not exactly happy. It was not as heavy as it might have been, but it stirred uneasily before this defrauded woman whom she had admired so much. She had not taken her husband from her. She had made it very clear to him, after that moment of crashing joy, that there were to be no more such moments. They had drawn apart, with the fire of a new world playing about their feet, and had deliberately trampled it out. Each had been appalled. Ralph, she knew, had accused himself of a

double treachery, toward his helpless wife on the one hand, and toward a defenseless girl on the other. When she had said in a proud little voice, "I think I had better go away," he had made no effort to shake her resolution. She had hit upon the only fair and sportsmanlike thing to do. She ought to go away. They couldn't go on seeing each other like this. He had left the room with a mutter of wretched words, asking for pardon.

"Oh, I think that would be much better," said Celia in answer to Mrs. Derwin's suggestion. As she turned over the pages to find the place where the comfortable future of *Conchita* was to be blighted, Irene looked at her with bitter scrutiny. Ralph might have shown more discrimination, she told herself ironically. The girl was well enough; a recognized romantic type, with her sweet skin and her natural, well-bred manner that could verge into a demure sparkle now and then. But she, Irene, had been so much more. It was a poor compliment to her.

Her wildest flight of imagination would never have presented her with the actual situation. To her, love was everything. To resist love was a contradiction in terms. Her good fortune had consisted in loving only one man; if any feeling can be called good that becomes not only the dominant but the sole motive power of existence. That two lovers should have confessed their love, and then given each other up, would never have occurred to her, except as a dramatic situation. It was not real life.

"Very well. I've worked it out, and made a rough copy." As the girl put out her hand for the scrawled sheets of letter paper Irene said swiftly: "Oh, no, you couldn't make it out; it's written like a vine, with tendrils all over the margins. I'll read it aloud, and you can write it down—not in shorthand, please—and type it later. But let me see it

first." This rather elaborate procedure was the method which Irene found most comfortable.

Irene opened the scrawl and began to read:

"Dear, if I have ever loved anything, it has been you——"

"Wait a minute, please, Mrs. Derwin, until I get my pad."

Irene impatiently pushed a pile of letter paper toward her.

"Use this. I hate to let these things get cold."

There was a knock at the door. Celia answered it. A large, placid woman with magnificent, fair hair and a broad, plain face stood there. She spoke apologetically in a Scandinavian accent.

"I am sorry, but this came yest from the drug store, and I thought madame might wish it now."

"Open it, please, Celia. Is it my sleeping medicine? Very well, Hedda, but don't let me be disturbed until I ring." The maid withdrew with a slightly scared expression that indicated the realization, in this well-trained household, even by the woman servants, that the mistress' work was work and not idle amusement, even if she did do it at home.

Irene turned to her secretary with a faint, secret smile.

"Now let's get on with the letter. Dear——"

After the dictation was over she read the pages over carefully, without making corrections. Then she sat looking thoughtfully out of the window. Half absently, she placed the sheets in a drawer of the table.

"I want to go over it again, sleep on it, perhaps. You have such a delightful, legible handwriting, Celia." She sighed. "Do you mind getting me a glass of water? I'm so thirsty."

When the water came, however, she placed it on the table without drinking it. She was turning over the leaves of the Memory Book.

"You've never written in this, have you? I should like you to. Your birthday is the seventh of April, isn't it?"

"You ought to know, Mrs. Derwin, after the lovely present you gave me," said the girl, glancing at her wrist watch.

Irene intentionally misunderstood the glance.

"Am I keeping you beyond the hour? You were going out for the afternoon, weren't you? Come in to see me to-night, won't you? I might have a new idea. Now, write your name here, and —here you are, with your proper date, way at the bottom of the ladder. The pages for the week are cut, each shorter than the other."

As the girl wrote, hurriedly and uncomfortably, in the slanted book on Irene's knee, she told herself that Mrs. Derwin looked too tired and gray to worry to-night. She had a sick person's horror of change. It would be better to wait until the morning before she gave her the news that her secretary was leaving her.

"I'm always glad to stay as long as you need me," she faltered, and then realized how her words next day would seem to contradict these. "I'll come in as soon as I get back."

When Celia had gone Irene wrote three perfectly commonplace notes. One was to an elderly and rather tiresome cousin, asking her to spend a week with them in July. One was to her manicure, making an appointment for the following Wednesday. One was to a bookseller, inquiring why some imported French books, ordered several months before, had not arrived.

Finally she wheeled herself into the next room and up to the typewriter. It took effort and care in steering her way around the furniture, but she managed it. Although she had written out the addresses of the three notes, she typed the fourth envelope which she took out of a box of stationery which stood on the table. It was the same sort of

letter paper that she kept in her own table drawer. There are idiosyncrasies in typing as well as in calligraphy. She remembered them.

Then she rang for the maid.

"Hedda," she said, "here are four letters. I want you to mail them yourself, as they are important. Do you understand?" She added impressively: "And don't mail them until the morning."

Hedda understood. There was to her, as her mistress knew, a quality of the sacred and the awful about all the papers of that gifted lady. She was a little afraid of them. She could obey orders, and did. Also—and this the girl flattered herself that madame did not know—Hedda, though a skillful and accomplished maid, could not read the English language. Moreover, she had no curiosity.

When Celia, according to her promise, went into Mrs. Derwin's room on her return, she first stood stockstill, and then uttered a cry that brought the servants running to the spot. Ralph Derwin, who had just come home, rushed in and leaned over the still thing in the wheel chair. Irene lay unconscious and seemingly without life.

Ralph Derwin stood in his wife's study the next afternoon. In his hand was an open letter. He had turned to his mail in a desperate attempt to throw off, even for a little, this choking atmosphere of tragedy. But this letter put the last hideous touch on things.

They had not been able to keep Irene awake. After all the things they had done to her to conquer the effects of the overdose, she had slipped away from them. That was horrible—horrible. But this was unbelievably worse.

"And I warned her, I warned her," Doctor Fames had repeated. "Hedda says that she brought up the medicine yesterday afternoon and handed it to Miss Wainwright. And look how much has gone out of it."

It seemed impossible that she was gone. All her things were about him, her flowers, her trinkets. He wondered whether she had finished that story. He hoped so; she would have wanted to. The worst of his grief was that he knew it to be imperfect. It was not so deep as it would have been a few months before. He felt like a cur. He turned his eyes resolutely away from the future.

The future? There was no future. This letter settled that. He read it again.

DEAR: If I have ever loved anything it has been you. Ever since the first time I saw you I have thought of you. I meant you to love me. All these months that has been coloring and molding my mind, making strange things seem quite natural and justifiable. I thought my love was strong enough to outlive remorse.

Do you guess now what I am going to tell you?

I have never believed in remorse. It seems to me that things do themselves. You can't act otherwise. I meant to be happy afterward, and rich and lovely and adored. I was going to be a superwoman, above compromises. What I wanted I took.

I wonder if you ever suspected that I was a person like that, seeing me day after day, so quiet and meek and well behaved. To understand me, you would have to know something about the way in which I was brought up, and my family. Especially my father. His tastes are coarser grained and he is more careless about giving himself away. But we both have the feeling, deep down in us, that whatever bit of joy or excitement can be squeezed out of the moment is that much gained. We believe in ourselves, just as trees might. There are the other trees and the sunshine and the seeds of destruction latent in the very conditions of life. Make the best of it which you may.

She was hardly alive and she kept me from living. For all I knew, it might go on for years. I couldn't wait. My best years might be thrown away and wasted. And I loved you so.

I wonder if you want the details. You can guess them, I think.

I thought I was strong enough to stand it, and live it down. But I have spent every moment since, looking into blackness. I can't make myself happy. I can't bear my-

self. I feel as if I had been given over to something frightful. I never believed in such things before. God never seemed real to me. Now I am terribly afraid that God is a living God.

You can do anything you like to me. I can't keep it to myself any longer. Nothing could be worse than this. As this is a confession, I sign my full name.

CELIA WAINWRIGHT.

The door opened. Ralph looked up impatiently.

Celia came in. She had gone home early in the morning, before this letter came. Hours before. Her pale, little face grew paler as she saw him.

He looked at her as if she had been a ghost. Indeed, the ghost of the woman who lay still and rigid in the house would have shocked him less. Without a word he handed the letter to her. She met his eyes with bewilderment.

"You wrote that?" he asked.

"Why, yes. But why is my name signed to it? I don't understand."

"We're both mad apparently," said Ralph curtly. "What on earth do you mean? If you wrote it, why shouldn't your name be there?"

"Because it was part of—of Mrs. Derwin's story. She dictated it to me."

He turned away. He was ashamed to look at her—ashamed for her. It struck him as such a bare-faced, such a childish attempt to deceive. Such a pitiful lie. Of course. In the reaction, after poisoning his wife, this girl, this slip of a bad stock, had not even had the stamina to keep silent and protect herself. He despised her the more. Infirm of purpose! She had lost her nerve, she had been terrified by inherited superstitions, rather than by anything higher. In the reaction, she had written him a confession. Had she had any crazy idea of throwing herself on his mercy, winning him through the devotion that had driven her even into crime to secure him? He was willing to believe anything tortuous and depraved about her motives. \*

But then had come a counter-reaction. Exactly what one would have expected. Self-interest had got the better of superstition. She had thought of a possible way out, after sending the letter. A wild and unpleasing way, but still one that a love-sodden and fatuous man might accept. She was pretending that the letter was not a true letter at all. That it was fiction, a trick foisted upon them by Irene. Irene, who had never dreamed of their treachery.

"You don't believe me?" she asked, as if she were amazed at his not believing. His memory went back to things he had read in his college days, things that the ancients and the fathers of the church had written of the duplicity and the depravity of the feminine nature. They had sounded like bad jokes. Had these old gentlemen been right, after all?

Suddenly she cried out:

"The book, the book!"

"Which book?" he asked involuntarily. There had been a disturbing tone of genuineness in that cry.

"The Memory Book. She made me write this letter. Then she sent me for a glass of water. When I came back—and, oh, she didn't touch the water!—she asked me to write my name in the book. You know how it is cut. She could have slipped this page in so that only the space at the bottom would have showed, and that would have looked like the page of the book. It's just the same white. The rest would have been hidden by the shorter page of the book just on top of it." She folded the paper feverishly to show him. "I didn't write in the book, though I thought I did. I wrote on this space, so that it looks as if I had signed the letter. That was it. That was it."

The library table was between them. He put his hands on it, and leaned toward her.

"Do you realize what you are saying? You tell me that my wife—my

wife—the most high-principled and the most unselfish woman I have ever known, stooped to a despicable trick like that? What did she do it for? It's impossible."

She looked at him in wonderment.

Then she spoke.

"Don't you see? She did it to separate us. She must have seen us yesterday when you—" She couldn't say it. He seemed to have forgotten all about it. This was not the man of yesterday. "She wanted to stretch her hand out of the grave, and hold us apart." For the first time she gave back something of his defiance. She had been all wild defense, but now the indignant sense of unjust accusation, the touch of pride, asserted itself. "And—she succeeded."

"I can't believe it," he said dully. "You mean that she deliberately killed herself so as to throw suspicion on you?" He gulped. "Why?"

"Why?" Why couldn't he see it? "Because she loved you."

"It's incredible."

"To die for love?" She spoke with weariness. "Just now it seems to me perfectly natural. When that's gone

what is there worth living for? And you forget—she did it to *keep* you. You'll never be able to bear the sight of me again."

It was so exactly what he himself was thinking that he dropped his eyes.

"I can't believe it," he said again.

"No, you would rather believe—anything against me. You would rather believe that I killed her than that she killed herself." She went on with the last flash of her spirit: "It's natural, I suppose. You've known her for years. I'm a stranger, practically. I'm only the girl you had a passing fancy for. When you find out that you are wrong, that you've done me the most cruel injustice— Well, she has succeeded. We could never feel the same toward each other again."

In the doorway she watched him for a second with hopeless eyes. What was there left to believe in if he could fail her like that?

"You see, she was much cleverer than either of us," she said, as if she were simply stating a fact. "You'll never forget her now."

Then she went out, and closed the door.



### ABELARD

AH, you forsook a love whom men found fair  
As Trojan Helen's bright-limbed majesty  
Of breast and lips and scented, curling hair  
For whom tall Menelaus fought the sea.  
And now you take the monkish cowl, pardie!  
Yet her soft body was a sweet so rare  
That, savoring, you found all heaven there,  
And God a withered leaf upon a tree!

Oh, Abelard, and were<sup>st</sup> you then so wise  
To leave a heaven bounded by your love  
For some thin vision of a world above,  
For aught you knew a mist of priestly lies?  
At least it can be said that here you strove,  
And won and lost a bright, sweet paradise!

JANE BARBARA ALEXANDER.

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# The Plunderers

By Winston Bouvé

Author of "Midas' Daughter,"  
"The Left Hand of Luck," etc.



## III.—PIGS AND PEARLS

**D**RUSILLA CARSTAIRS, dressing for dinner—a thing she had not done for months—idled the cozy, candlelit hour away luxuriously. Mrs. Bosford's own maid, Mathilde, served her deftly, perfectly; coiling her cloudy, dark hair high on her head, fastening the primrose wisp of a gown beneath her ivory shoulders, turning her out, in short, as if she were Dru Carstairs of olden days—of Presidio Terrace—who had had as deft-fingered a maid of her own to make her beautiful.

Later, when Mathilde had finished and left her lounging on the little sofa, drawn close to the windows that looked out upon the bay, it was easy to forget that she was any other than that Dru-silla. Until a sudden change of mood, a hot passion of longing for, of envy of the things about her seized her, racked her.

Everything in the silk-hung chamber roused her to bitterness that, transitory as it was, scorched her. The toilet table, whose Cupid-wreathed mirror might have—and probably had—framed the image of a Pompadour, the bed, a canopied glory, every detail of the costly room turned her hotly covetous. For it brought up the image of her own small bedroom, which overlooked the grimy bricks of a court.

That she and her brother, Lorry, de-

lightful, pleasure-loving Lorry, who hated ugliness as much as she did, should be sentenced to it as they were! Because Jason Meade had plundered them—another Jason, who, in quest of the golden fleece, had used his Medea to find it—they must do time in a shabby flat, among shabby things, evading creditors, who seemed to be omnipresent! Dru-silla, her wax-red mouth sullen, found herself computing the cost of the Dresden candlesticks, the filet of the coverlet. What Kate Bosford spent on her Pekinese would keep her and Lorry in something like luxury. It wasn't fair!

If Dru had been the type of woman who is given to tears she would have buried her head in the scented pillow and wept out of sheer self-pity. But she was of a different breed. Instead, she sank her white front teeth into her wax-red lower lip, twisted her web of a handkerchief until it shredded.

"Beast!" she scored herself. "Graceless little wretch, after Kate's lavish hospitality, the gifts she has showered upon you!"

She sprang up, paced the pearl-gray rug, stemming the torrent of her rebellious, bitter discontent, unshed tears stinging her black-lashed blue eyes. In the adjoining room Lorry whistled gayly. He seemed contented enough with the new order of things. Just a year ago, she remembered, he and she had shaken

the dust of San Francisco from their feet, come to New York to make a new start, after everything had been swept away from them by the unscrupulous Meade.

He had done more than plunder them of the fortune old Carstairs had left in his keeping; he had changed the lovely Dru from an impulsive, light-hearted girl, whose sophistication had not lessened a generous faith in people and things, into a rather cynical young woman who eyed the world and his wife through cold and disillusioned, if none the less lovely, eyes. She had been a romantic creature, that other Dru. But that, too, was over and done with. Love. Her lip curled at the word, that might have been written in an unknown tongue for all it meant to her now. Meade had professed love for her. And she had believed his protestations of devotion. She put the thought from her.

Some one rapped gently on her door. It was Kate Bosford, still wrapped in a negligee, dewy-eyed from the nap that was part of her afternoon's program.

She was a pretty, rounded little creature, in spite of her thirty-five years, reminding one of a charming kitten which demands constant attention and caresses. Not that she was unbecomingly coy, or kittenish, or even arch; she was merely ease-loving, gentle, responsive to tenderness, and full of a childlike gayety that charmed those who loved her, and made the rest of the world consider her rather silly. Moreover, she possessed a pair of round, absurdly wistful eyes precisely the color and shape of a young kitten's, which made the likeness complete.

She was silly. The rest of the world was quite right. No clever, or even sensible woman, worth millions that were all her own, would have done the mad things that she had done quite casually. Her first marriage had ended disastrously, as every one had predicted. Mark Travis was an adventurer of the

lowest order. And, blind to everything but his admitted attraction for women, knowing nothing of him, and believing nothing that she was told, she had walked into his calculating arms. In six months she knew the man for what he was. And for three years she tried to make the best of the bargain, and hold her silly little head high.

And then, after some especially flagrant breach of decency, she knew that it was at best not a bargain at all, but a pitiful fraud; and with dignity as well as pathos, she let him go. After the divorce—quixotically she had settled a round sum upon him, to keep him from doing anything too dreadful, she told her snorting lawyer—she left America for the playgrounds of Europe. And there, three years later, she met Alan Bosford, a plain, shy man, considerably older than she was, and as mously unattractive as the reprobate Travis had been charming.

Perhaps it was his middle-aged sedateness, his retiring manner, that appealed to her. He seemed reliable, honorable, the antithesis of the other. And, caught in Baden during the epochal beginnings of the war, she turned to him helplessly. He got her out of the country, and on a homeward-bound ship, already crowded with panic-stricken Americans. And by the time the boat docked they were engaged. Their marriage had been peaceful enough, but people guessed that it was no love match. Bosford, as a prince consort, behaved himself admirably; wrapped up in his books, of which he—or, to be quite truthful, she—had a remarkably fine collection. Certainly he was not to blame for the rift that was perceptibly widening.

Drusilla, the guest of this curiously matched couple, knew futilely that no one was to blame. She knew, as other people did, that silly, pretty Kitty Bosford was infatuated now with the youngish and thoroughly likable secretary she had procured for her husband.

A strange household it was, seemingly lost in the enormous Plandome place. Kitty, her husband, who had never learned to take her seriously, young Charley Severn, everlastingly cataloguing the books. He was a nice fellow, too. Neither adventurer nor *Lothario*, but simply, and quite miserably, in love with the rich Mrs. Bosford. That was what he seemed. Yet Dru, who had no illusions, wondered. Poor Kitty! Was she fated to be once more the prey of a fortune hunter?

"What do you think of him?" asked Kitty, as she settled herself on the sofa, dipped into the box of sweets at her hand. Her hyacinth-blue eyes were fixed wistfully upon Drusilla.

"Of young Mr. Severn?" Dru's swallow's-wing brows arched.

"You *were* thinking of him, you know!"

"Quite charming," pronounced Drusilla judicially. "I've a weakness for gray eyes, flecked with sunlight."

Kitty hid her face, like a small, embarrassed child.

"I don't mean his eyes, or his figure. I mean—Don't be dense, Dru!"

"My dear, I don't know the man!"

Drusilla, embarrassed herself, turned away. Kitty was curiously childlike in her supreme simplicity about people and things. Yet there was something unusually fine about her; another woman, in her position, would have made a clandestine intrigue of the whole affair. And here she was, admitting to another woman the simple fact of her love for Severn, in as many words.

"You mean—is he Prince Charming, or knave o' hearts?"

It was what Kitty Bosford did mean, beyond a doubt. Pathetically, she had reached the point of wanting reassurance.

"I'm thirty-five," said Kitty, wincing at the admission. "He's only thirty. And I'm neither beautiful nor fascinating. I'm pretty in my own setting, es-

pecially made for me, and that's all. Besides, Charley's clever—clever enough to be anything that he wanted to be. And I—I'm a silly little thing!"

"Does he love me?" asked her clear eyes. "Or is it my money—as it was before?"

Drusilla, hardly knowing what to say, how to console her, saw tears glinting on the little woman's lashes. She loved him, did Kitty. And, silly, light-headed doll that she was, she was suffering in her torturing uncertainty. Her piteous eyes clung to Dru's face. Her small hand crept to the strand of pearls, encircling her round throat. Dru, who had once had a passion for pearls, thought fleetingly of the old superstition that they, more than any other jewel, quicken to the mood of the one who wears them. Just now they had a lifeless look; seemed, in the half light, to have lost the sheen and radiance that belonged to them. They were tears, to-night, pale tears, mute symbols of the heavy heart beneath them.

"You're a lovely thing, Kitty. Lovely enough for any man to love. And I'm almost sure that your money doesn't matter to him—it didn't to Alan."

Queer, to be speaking of her husband like this. And yet not so queer, for every one knew that Bosford was only the steward of her vast estates. She had married him for protection more than anything else; and he her, because she was helpless, alone. It must have given him a thrill of gratification to realize that a woman found him stanch enough to turn to, cling to, shy creature that he was. Still, there were the conventions to be considered. Drusilla was an unexpectedly practical person.

"He's leaving, of course? Alan has to be thought of."

"Of course." Mrs. Bosford's cheeks flamed. "He couldn't stay. He leaves to-night, after dinner, and Alan—"

Drusilla frowned as her brother announced himself at the moment.

"Oh, sorry!"

Kitty caught up her trailing pink draperies.

"Come in, Lorry. I must run away and finish dressing. No wonder I have such a time keeping a butler. I'm never ready when meals are!"

She fluttered out.

Lorry, luxuriating in the rarefied air about them, strolled window-ward, after bestowing an affectionate pat of approbation upon Dru's shoulder.

"It's nice to put on a dinner coat at the proper hour," he sighed. "Jove, this week-end's been a blessing!"

She sent a loving look toward him, as he stood there, slim and straight against the amethystine sky. He was such a thoroughbred. Infinitely more sporting than she was about their ill fortune, in spite of the fact that his shoulders bore the brunt of it all. It was he who had had to use their acquaintance with one Alden Griggs—who hadn't approved of her, incidentally, during their gay, care-free days on the Continent, where they had met at a world-famed casino—to be taken into his New York brokerage firm at a mere pittance. And on that pittance they were living now. The minute capital they had was carefully invested, in order that it might one day amount to something. And from time to time Drusilla added to it by means that, unconventional though they were, seemed justifiable to her—at least part of the time.

It was a plundering world. One plundered—or was plundered. Drusilla, scornful of it all, had made a code for herself and Lorry. They were to pit their wits against men and women who had defrauded others. They were to profit only at the expense of those who had already profited unfairly. And they were to help the weak. Decent enough it sounded, and kind. Yet—

"It's been beastly awkward," Dru sighed.

"Amazing situation." Lorry lighted

her cigarette, wanting to discuss it, yet not sure whether or not it would be the proper thing to do. "He—Severn—seems a nice chap, and clever, too. Funny that he's willing to be a secretary, isn't it?"

Dru shook her sleek black head.

"No. He's rather delicate, and he cares more about books than anything in the world, I think. Besides, a position of this sort gives him time to himself. He's writing a book."

"Poor old Alan! It's rather rotten on him, after all. To be the husband of an heiress isn't all it's cracked up to be!"

Thoughtfully, Dru agreed with him.

Dinner was not a successful meal. Bosford, looking tired and old, was silent. Young Charley Severn—he was a handsome creature, with fine gray eyes and a sensitive mouth, a well-shaped head and a jaw that belied the rather delicate chiseling of his features—was ill at ease, constrained. Dru guessed that the thing had been openly discussed between them. They were honest enough for that, all of them.

Drusilla and her brother made the hour endurable with light talk that never flagged, and Kitty, frocked in black velvet that set off her nicely waved fair hair, her round white arms and shoulders, rallied and played up to them, though her eyes were upon the man she loved, each cadence of her voice directed to him.

Her nervousness was apparent. Her hands moved amid the silver at her place, played restlessly with the single flower that swayed from a thin-blown slender vase before her. And just before they rose to leave the table for coffee on the veranda, she raised a goblet of water to her lips, all but drained it, and, at an unexpected word from her husband, let it slip from her fingers. It splintered upon the Sèvres plate, the remaining drops of water splashing her.

"How stupid of me!" Flushing, she patted her bedewed cheek with her napkin, careful of rouge and powder.

Drusilla, exclaiming over the damage to the velvet gown, saw Lorry's fixed gaze fasten upon his hostess' throat. He wore a queer, startled look.

"The pearls—" he began.

"You're drenched!" Dru mopped delicately at her beaded bodice and the gems.

"I'm quite all right. The gown isn't hurt at all," protested Kitty, still pink and perturbed. She dropped the napkin, her restless fingers entwining themselves in the necklace. "What are you staring at, Lorry? Am I ruined by my shower?"

There was a tinkling sound as the strand of pearls, twisted in her nervous hand, broke, and the small, perfectly matched, gems were scattered right and left.

"My pearls!" cried Kitty tragically.

There was an ensuing scramble in which they all took part, and, though the gems had rolled a considerable distance, they were all recovered more or less breathlessly. It was Lorry who dropped the last milky globule into her cupped palms. His words struck them all with amazement.

"You know, of course, that these aren't real."

Kitty stared at him. Dru heard a sharply intaken breath behind her.

"Not real! My dear boy, I paid for them! What *do* you mean?"

Lorry took one, held it to the light.

"A very good imitation. A Roman bead of very clever make. I thought of course you knew. When you splashed yourself with water, these got wet, thoroughly wet. Pearls don't. Water doesn't spread on them, but forms a single drop, rolls off. I was sure then!"

"Impossible!" murmured Kitty, pale under her rouge.

Bosford snatched at one of them, examined it sharply, nodded at last, and,

sickening, Dru knew that her brother was right. Why, she could have told that they were false herself! She had noticed earlier that something was amiss with them, had foolishly reminded herself of the legendary fame of pearls, which are supposed to change and shimmer and tint with the mood of their wearer. Lorry knew. Their charming, dilettante father had been something of a jewel collector, and Lorry had shared his taste for fine stones. She had never bought a jewel without first having him see it.

Bosford dropped the bead dazedly.

"But you had the clasp mended only last week, don't you remember, Kitty? I myself took them in to Tiffany's, brought them back to you on Wednesday. The string was intact then, surely."

"It's counterfeit now," said Severn.

"You may go, Thompson." Kitty nodded dismissal to the butler, who would have gaped had he not been the automaton he was. She stared at them all, wide-eyed and pale. "In these three days, then— Oh, I can't believe it!" Her voice broke.

"Where do you keep them? asked Dru.

"Down here, in the study safe. I don't think it's fair to tempt servants with jewels lying about. So not even my maid had the opportunity—unless I left them for a few moments on my dressing table."

Severn smiled curiously.

"Only Mr. Bosford and myself know the combination."

"I do!" Drusilla, tense, turned to Lorry as he spoke. "Wednesday night you showed me how to work the safe, Kitty. Remember? You wanted to show me those old cameos."

A few moments later in the study, across the hall, Kitty knelt to make sure that the other contents of the safe were intact. It had certainly not been broken into. Dizzily she got to her feet, and

Dru, her heart pounding with a nameless dread, saw her husband's eyes meet hers.

"The real pearls are gone," he said slowly. "How, we don't know. I can't understand it. But the fact remains. Do you wish the police notified, Kitty, or not? It seems as if there must be some terrible mistake!" He looked at them each in turn, spoke again with an effort. "All of us are implicated, in a way; each of us might have a motive, that is—"

His tired mouth twitched in a bitter smile, reminding them that he, too, had been a poor man when he married gilded Kitty. But his gaze lingered longest on Charley Severn, whose eyes were no longer sunny. Dru knew what was in his mind. It was rather decent of him to want to save his wife from the unpleasantness of having the secretary involved. He suspected him, then.

Kitty, still ashen, turned away.

"No." The word was a sob. "The police could be of no use. We had better—forget the incident."

Her husband opened his lips to protest; closed them without speaking.

"Anything but that," said Severn, who had watched her turn away with anguished eyes.

Dru caught her hand, squeezed it tenderly. Poor little unhappy doll-woman! But Kitty lifted a proud little chin, presently.

"I'm sorry that this has happened, and on your last evening here, Mr. Severn. I had hoped you would take only—pleasant memories away with you. But you've still an hour before your train leaves. Dru, will you play for us?"

Alone with Lorry, hours later—it had been a wretched evening—Dru gave way to a hysterical moment rare to her.

"Lorry, I'm afraid! He was right when he said—each of us might have a motive."

7—Ains.

Her hot hands gripped her brother's shoulders as she searched his sea-blue eyes, which were replicas of her own. He shook his dark head impatiently.

"Dru! You don't think for a moment that I had anything to do with the theft of the pearls, you crazy child!"

She dropped into a forlorn heap on the little sofa. She hated herself for the faithless thought, but she was getting to the point where most things were conceivable to her, under a given set of circumstances. It was what came, she supposed drearily, of lowering one's own standards, of slackening up on points of integrity. Once one made a variable code for one's self, one lost all faith in other people's.

"I know it. But it's myself that I've learned to distrust, Lorry. Not you. Or rather, I've learned to rely on the most primitive instincts that crop out in all of us. They're there, waiting for the need to become manifest. Honor's a word; greed a primordial passion."

He could still shake her back into her sane, level-headed self, this beloved brother of hers.

"You're thinking all this rot because you're living at high tension—the wrong sort of life. Adventuring isn't for your sort, Dru. You're too fine to compromise. Marry, for Heaven's sake, and put yourself in the proper setting."

She smiled at him wanly.

"Beside some man who could take care of me! Kitty did that, and she's a miserable little mortal now. I'd be worse off, for all she bargained for was some one to shield her from the unpleasant things, to take care of her in unmartial ways. She bought that with cash. I'd have to sell myself! No, my dear, a loveless marriage isn't my aim."

"I'm sorry about Severn," said Lorry, not so irrelevantly. "I didn't think this of him."

"But you do now?"

She was remembering his fine mouth, his frank, charming eyes.

"My dear girl, what else is there to think?" It was he who was cynical now. "He got in a jam, no doubt, and saved himself when the opportunity offered. He had no opportunity to relieve her of cash; Bosford handles all the accounts, punctilious cuss that he is! Let's be fair, though. I don't for a minute believe Severn ever planned this. He isn't such a rotter as all that. He just got in deep water, and had to pull out."

"By Kitty's pearls!" Drusilla shivered. "And to-night, Lorry, I was almost sure that he loved her for her own sake, without a thought for the Shane millions!"

"She believes that he took the pearls, substituted the other strand?" Lorry asked.

"Of course. She was rather superb about it, wasn't she? But she's heart-broken, too."

Of that there was little doubt. As Dru was beguiling sleeplessness with a book of travel Mathilde knocked, tripped in with a message for mam'selle. Dru scrambled for slippers, wrapped herself in a gauzy-green negligee, and traversed the great tapestried hall to her friend's room. And there, like an abandoned doll in the mauve-and-blue chamber, whose richness overshadowed her pathetically, Kitty Bosford lay weeping.

Dru seated herself on the edge of the bed, and gathered the little figure into her arms.

"He isn't worth it, dearest!"

"I know. But, Dru—he's all I had! And now—" Kitty raised her head, showed a face ruined with tears, its doll-like beauty lost.

"All you had!" echoed Dru. "Why, Kitty!"

"All that mattered. What has the other thing—my money—done for me? I've never been happy in my life. Mark married me for my money, got what he could out of me—to spend on other women! I married Alan because my money didn't matter to him, any more

than I did. And now, for the first time, I love with my heart and soul, and the man I love stoops to steal from me! Dru, I'd gladly give every penny I possess to be able to believe in him—and I can't!"

"Did he admit that he had taken the pearls?"

"Charley, confess? Never! He's stubborn to the last degree. He pretended to be terribly hurt by my lack of faith in him; looked at me so that I would have shriveled with shame if I hadn't known. Dru, he has needed money. I was signing some checks at the desk one day, and my eye fell on the first paragraph of a dunning letter. He snatched it up, flushing; rebuffed me when I tried to make him accept a loan, and"—she smothered a sob—"he was the one person who had access to the safe at any time." Her voice, rough with grief, wandered on: "Alan knows he took them. But Alan's kind to me, and my pride. He knows. Three days ago I told him that I'd found—love. Very quietly, so that there would be no scandal, I was to get a divorce, marry Charley in a year. I suppose his financial need was immediate; he couldn't wait that long. He said he loved me. I'd have sworn he did!"

Drusilla would have given a good deal to have been able to comfort the elder woman. And all that she had to bulwark her own faint faith was the memory of sun-flecked gray eyes, through which, it seemed to her, nothing dishonorable had ever peered, of a sensitive, firmly cut mouth. She wondered whether that other adventurer, Travis, had had eyes and lips like that.

What beasts they both were! Poor Kitty, plundered of even her tender heart! It was always the trusting, generous fools who were plundered; who, blind to all but their impulses, lavished what they had upon the most unworthy. She had cast her pearls before swine, indeed!

"Try to sleep now, Kitty, I won't have you cheated by Severn! He knew that you'd do just what you did; he traded upon your pride, your love for him to protect him if he was found out in the theft. That's the beastliest part of it. You're going to get your pearls back!"

"I don't want them!" The words were a strangled wail. "I'd rather always be—not quite sure!"

So she, too, was remembering his fine eyes, his lips. Other things, too.

"No, you wouldn't. You think so now, but the doubt—and we are doubting, both of us—would keep you always on the rack. If you had sent him off, and he hadn't been guilty—"

Small, hot hands gripped her.

"You think there's a chance? Dru, I'd give anything to know the truth!"

"Consistent creature!" Deftly Drusilla tucked the covers about her, snapped off the lights. "You shall know the truth. I'm clever about this sort of thing, Kitty. I'm almost sure I can find out what really happened—and no one else need ever know!"

With that rash promise she went back to her own room, and, no longer trying to woo slumber, was asleep in five minutes.

Clever as Drusilla was, as she had modestly admitted, luck had a trick of helping her out whenever she found herself up a blind alley. The next morning, closeted with Kitty—Bosford and Lorry had both gone into town—she reached what seemed like a blank wall.

She had called Charley Severn, at the only address they had, a cheap lodging house in which he roomed, while in town. He was only out at Plandome for a particular piece of work, which had, of course, been left undone. A sharp female voice had doled them the meager information that the night before he had given up his room, had taken his trunk with him, and departed, leaving no forwarding address. It was

rather to be expected, under the circumstances, but it was a distinct blow to Drusilla's planning.

And then luck intervened in a ladylike fashion.

The phone at Drusilla's elbow tinkled. She lifted the receiver.

"Yes, Mrs. Bosford's residence."

A feminine voice, young, fresh, rather pleasant to the ear, but with an urgent ring to it, asked for Mr. Severn.

"Mr. Severn is not here at the moment." Dru paused, one hand guarding the mouthpiece. Did this unseen girl have anything to do with the stolen pearls? Kitty, flushed, leaned forward.

"A woman?" she asked. "I never thought of *that*!"

Dru spoke, having made up her mind with characteristic suddenness.

"I shan't tell her he's gone. I'll get her number, trace it." She readdressed the mouthpiece. "If you'll give me your number, I'll have him call you as soon as he comes in."

Her pencil took down the number, the Circle exchange, and, with a little cry of amazement, she hung up.

"We won't have to trace it far," she told Kitty. "It's my own telephone number—or rather, the switchboard number of my own apartment house. I've always felt that that place was like the Grand Central Station. Eventually everybody comes there. Now, shall we wait until Alan comes back, or shall I go into town—I'm leaving to-day, anyway—and look the girl up myself!"

"You do it!" determined Kitty. "I'd rather Alan—didn't even know!"

"There's a three-o'clock train I can make nicely. Suppose you meet me in town a little later, at my apartment. We'll have dinner somewhere, and go to the theater. The last of the Guild productions closes this week."

Kitty laughed mirthlessly. She was not in a theater mood, but, childlike, she would have acceded to any suggestion Dru made. And she was piteously eager

to learn whatever there was to find out about the girl who had wanted to get in touch with Charley Severn.

So after luncheon, and a drive along the Sound, Dru left the beautiful stone house set high on a hill, framed in oaks, for an hour's train trip, a taxi that seemed springless and shoddy, after Kitty's purring limousine and its suède-soft interior that received you like a caress as you sank into its perfect upholstery.

Her own apartment building, in the West Eighties, had never looked so shabby, so cheap, so unutterably common to her. It was hot, with intense, early summer heat, in the city. The black-and-white foyer, with its dusty palms and gilding that was wearing off, was stuffy. Drusilla knew that her small apartment would be close, dusty. She would have to have a maid she sometimes employed clean it thoroughly.

She got her mail, paused at the switchboard. The colored boy who presided there met her with an ear-to-ear flash of ivory in his dusky countenance. He was her willing slave, and she knew it.

"You come back in time for some shonuff hot weather, Mis' Cahstairz. Reckon you'd bettah 'uv stayed out in the country!"

"I was called back. Was it you who got me at Plandome this morning? Some one called from here but the connection wasn't good. I thought it might be Mr. Flynn, about the paper hangers."

He bent over the all-but-illegible list of calls put in that morning.

"No, ma'am, hit warn't Mistah Flynn; hit was dat Mis' French callin' dat place. You know, dat light young lady whut lives in fo' B, right across the hall f'um you?"

Dru did know. So it was Vieva French who had telephoned Charley Severn, with a certain staccato insistence in her voice. Vieva French, a pretty, dubious young woman whose flat across the hall, a duplicate of Drusilla's, was gaudy and gay and gilt, like Vieva.

Once, when Dru had lost her key, and Lorry was unreachable, she hadn't been able to find the janitor, who had the pass-key. Miss French had come upon her in her predicament, and insisted that she wait in her apartment. A friendly, rather attractive little creature, with that quality about her and her blondined hair and creamy skin, that spells lure to the average man. Yet somehow it was strange that Severn should have succumbed to such obvious charms.

Dru tipped the boy, crossed the not immaculate floor to the small elevator, and was taken up to her floor.

The elevator man stepped out after her, and whisked out his pass-key.

"Let you in, Mis' Cahstairz?"

"No, thank you. I want to see Miss French."

He went back to his cage, and she rang Vieva's bell. Better get the thing over with. The girl was friendly, a very decent sort, in spite of her commonness. And Dru could always depend on her quick wits to handle people.

She rang again, and only silence answered her summons. An idea came to her. Perhaps it was just as well that the girl was out. Her absence would give her, Dru, the opportunity to make sure of what she suspected. She turned the knob, which did not give. But it would be easy enough to gain admittance, she knew, by telling Jackson, the elevator boy, that Miss French was expecting her.

And then she sprang away from the door. The elevator was creaking up, coming to a stop. If this should be Vieva, her swiftly formulated plan would not work. It was not she, but a bundle-burdened young woman who lived at the other end of the corridor, with a sick husband and an ill-tempered child. Poverty and all its pitiful pretenses lived in this cheap, pretentious apartment court.

A minute later, after a brief colloquy, Jackson opened the door for her, and

Drusilla walked into the crowded sitting room she remembered so well. It was a shoddy place, with the electric lights burning, midafternoon though it was. But then, its only outlook was a narrow court, through which not even summer sunlight ever strayed. Dru, red upper lip curled, shuddered at the plush furniture, the baby-grand piano, with its litter of ragtime sheet music and photographs, inartistically spread over batik drapery. Bulky floor lamps, with obvious rose-and-gold chiffon shades, heavily tasseled, stood about the room. There were neither books nor pictures to lend distinction to the bare walls.

Drusilla, picking her way through ornate furniture, was filled with distaste for her self-imposed task. It was a mad thing to be doing, after all. What business had she to be rifling this woman's belongings on a clew as slight as hers? Half ready to leave the flat, instinct stayed her feet.

"Now that you're in the place, get what you came for, at least! It's luck, her not being here," she mused.

Instinct continued to prompt her. Vieva was so entirely the type of woman that a man, once infatuated with, would want to shower with handsome gifts—she'd demand tribute of the sort! Severn, enamored of her golden hair, her gray-green eyes, would want to clasp a worth-while gift about her creamy throat. She probably had a passion for pearls, knowing how they would set off her bold beauty, and the sheer black she always wore!

Dru looked into the bedroom, entered it, snapping on a bevy of pink-shaded lights. Her fastidious nostrils wrinkled at the stale, rather cheap scent that pervaded it.

It was an untidy place. The gray-enamelled bed was unmade. The drawers of the dresser, half open and overflowing, spilled silk and chiffon lingerie on the near-by chairs. But it was not the perfumed disorder of the room that

fascinated Dru. She crossed the floor, stood before the triple-mirrored dressing table, whose top was littered with toilet things and bottles and spilled powder.

There, half hidden by a single discarded silk stocking, lay an oval case of imitation leather. Drusilla picked it up, touched the spring. The cover sprang back, disclosing—a strand of perfectly matched, milky pearls, whose sheen and tint were unmistakable, whose dainty diamond clasp she recognized.

The stolen pearls—worth thousands, undoubtedly—lying there in full view, as if they were so many beads! A bottle of toilet water stood at her hand. She flicked a perfumed drop upon the last shimmering gem, and watched it roll off, leaving the white globule unwet.

So! She had proved to her own satisfaction that Severn had robbed her friend, had given her pearls to this woman. The pearls themselves nestled in the palm of her hand. Poor Kitty, doubly betrayed! She should at least have her pearls back. But Drusilla's enthusiasm had left her; there was very little satisfaction in her find, after all. The shrill ringing of a bell close at hand startled her. On an impulse she dropped the necklace down the neck of her blue-crêpe frock, slipped out of the bedroom. If it were Vieva—

She realized suddenly that it was not the doorbell, but the ringing of the phone on the wall that had reached her ears. She took down the receiver, spoke.

"Yes?"

A voice she knew well answered brusquely.

"This is Severn speaking," said he. "May I see you right away?"

No time for tender greetings now, thought Dru scornfully. Not with the possibility of the police on his trail! He hadn't expected the false substitution to be discovered so soon, of course.

"Very well."

Purposely she changed the timbre of

her voice. Let him think it was Vieva speaking, let him come, face her with the confounding proof of his treacherous guilt. Her sea-blue eyes gray and stormy, she tightened her lips. Though he escaped actual prosecution Severn should not escape being told what Dru had to tell him. He was due for a bad half hour, at least. And the woman—perhaps, though, Vieva was unaware of his method of procuring this gift for her.

Dru passed a restive twenty minutes. If only he would come and get it over with before the girl came back and found her there. For if Vieva returned before Severn's arrival there would be a scene. The Vievas always make scenes. And that, Drusilla realized, would frustrate her campaign in Kitty's behalf. And the contemplation of Kitty's utter defeat she could not bear.

At last the creak of the elevator rising in the shaft, the clang of the metal door. With the pearls cool against her bosom, she braced herself to face the man whose heavy footsteps were approaching the outer door, waited for his ring. Now that the moment was upon her she dreaded it mortally.

He didn't ring, but inserted his key in the door. His key! Poor, plundered Kate!

The door opened upon a tall figure. And Dru, a cry of astonishment on her lips, crumpled, literally, into one of Vieva's blue-velvet chairs. For it was not Charley Severn, but Alan Bosford himself who stood there, as astonished as the girl herself.

There was more than amazement written upon him; there was fear, shame and, strangely enough, a sort of weary relief. Like a flood tide, these mingled emotions succeeded one another, swept over his drawn, middle-aged features. He steadied himself against the wall.

"How did you guess?" he asked, in but little more than a whisper.

Drusilla, pale-lipped, laughed.

"That it was you? I didn't—until you stood in the doorway!"

Kitty's husband, here in this perfumed flat, into which he had let himself with his own key! It was unbelievable, but true. She put her hands to her throbbing temples, staring at him curiously.

"And you let Kitty think Severn guilty! Alan, how could you?"

He dropped into a chair; covered his face with his hands.

"I didn't plan that—it simply happened. Let me tell you how, and why. I have to tell myself, from time to time." He paused, then plunged into the pitiful, sordid tale. "You know—every one knows—how badly our marriage has gone. Kitty didn't want me as a husband; she ought to have hired me as overseer, steward, traveling escort. Poor girl, she hasn't been happy, either. It's a hideous situation! And I—I didn't marry her for her money, I swear it! Money never mattered to me—until I had it. It's an insidious thing. But I've never defrauded her of one penny aside from the pearls. I've kept her accounts to the letter; I've even refused to let her pay my personal bills. Then—I met Vieva. Never mind how. I love her, that's enough. And I knew myself bound, as Kitty's husband, whom Kitty didn't want. But in decency I couldn't ask her to free me.

"And then Severn came along. And Kitty told me. That wasn't a week ago, but it seems like a century! And when I realized that I was cut loose, free, out of that stone prison, I realized that I couldn't live outside of that stone prison, now. Her money got me in the end, you see. I thought of Vieva, of her craving for pleasure, luxury—not our kind, but nevertheless beyond any means of mine, and the thought of poverty was intolerable. Like a fated thing, the opportunity of taking the pearls came to me. I couldn't resist it. It was so beautifully simple, to take them to the jeweler's, prolong the time

of their stay there in the repair shop, have them duplicated—”

Drusilla had drawn forth the softly gleaming string of pearls, and held it in her open palm.

He pointed to it.

“You don’t know what that string of baubles meant to me. It meant the safeguarding of our love, Vieva’s and mine. It meant the difference between absolute want, and comfort, for years to come. I took them, handed Kitty the false necklace, gave this to Vieva.”

There was a knock on the door.

“Charley Severn,” said Dru softly. “He deserves to hear the story.”

She let him in, told him, in a few words, what had gone before. He faced Bosford.

“I had charge of your mail, and one day I opened a personal letter by mistake. That gave me—a clew, when this thing happened. I had guessed the truth before I came here to-day. I expected to find Miss French, and make sure of it. I’m sorry, Bosford. But when your wife thought it was I who had taken her pearls, I had to root the thing up! I telephoned Miss French but she was not at home, so I left a message, asking her to call me.”

So that was why Vieva French had telephoned Severn this morning. Dru, singularly light-hearted, sent him an understanding little smile. His fine gray eyes, which were not sun-flecked or gay at that moment, met hers honestly.

Bosford spoke. He seemed to be listening for something. Was it the creak of the ascending elevator? It came, the sound of the metal door as it closed, and then light, quick footsteps.

“Vieva!” He flung back his head. “Do what you like with me, but don’t let her come into this. She doesn’t guess the truth. I told her they were—Téclas!”

Framed in the doorway, blond hair bright against the lacy brim of her auda-

cious black hat, penciled brows lifted, Miss French waited. She was a comprehending young person. Her greenish eyes roved from Bosford to the other man, to Drusilla, rested at last on the sheenful pearls.

“What do you mean—Téclas?” she inquired. “And what are you doing with mine?”

Ready for almost anything, Dru shrugged. She would have to be told. Bosford, pallid, worn, turned away from the waiting girl. And then, astonishingly, she waited no longer, but moved to his side seating herself on the arm of his chair, linking one white arm about his neck.

“Maybe—they aren’t Téclas. So that’s it! And he—stole them for me? Well, here I am. I begged him to do it! But I didn’t realize he had.”

The arm about Bosford’s neck tightened; the plump white hand pressed itself against his protesting lips.

Severn interrupted her.

“Miss French, please! Mr. Bosford has just told us the whole story. He’d like to tell it to you, if we give him the opportunity. And Mrs. Bosford, whose pearls these are, has already agreed to forget the incident. No action will be taken, I assure you!”

It was time for him and Drusilla to go, and together they left the shoddy, close room, where Bosford huddled in a chair, his shoulders heaving, and the painted lady for whom he had risked a great deal knelt beside him, comforting him with lips and voice. It was an amazing ending to the interlude.

Dru, thinking of the other ending, stayed Severn with a hand on his arm.

“You must wait. Kitty’s coming to meet me.”

He didn’t have to wait long, hardly long enough to express his gratitude to the clever young woman whose apartment, charming, if a trifle shabby, beckoned to him across the hall. But, Dru thought with a sigh, it was all too

long for his impatience. She wasn't used to having young men endure her presence for the sake of a loved one. And he was pitifully impersonal. It gave her a sense of absurd loneliness.

Then Kitty came, shrank back, with burning cheeks, and a pitiful attempt at dignity, when she saw who it was standing by the window. But Drusilla, dropping the pearls into her outstretched hands, sketched the story to her. And Charley Severn, oblivious of the pearls and Drusilla alike, took her in his arms.

Dru, oddly moved, bent, a moment later, to retrieve the gems, that lay glistening forgotten on the floor. After all, they were pearls!

"Put them on, Kitty, and keep them, this time," she admonished gently.

Romance was all very well, but pearls were pearls.

Kitty took them apologetically, flung her arms about Dru, with warm, whispered thanks. A minute later Dru felt the strand about her own fair throat, gasped her protestations.

"But, Kitty, I can't accept these. They're immensely valuable, you mad child!"

Kitty, her hyacinth eyes the sweetest and bluest things in the world, pleaded enchantingly.

"Not a thousandth part as valuable as what you've given me, Dru. You've given me the most priceless thing, made me utterly happy! And I want you to have them!"

Drusilla, a cynical, charming smile on her lips, but not in her eyes, which were rather somber, shrugged.

"You shouldn't tempt me like this, Kitty. I'll live on them for the next ten years! No, I won't. I'll keep them for a life raft—until I'm in desperate straits! And, properly emphasized, these pearls will put life-blood into my rapidly failing credit!"

The lovers were lost again in each other. Dru, recognizing her superfluity in the pleasant sitting room, in which they seemed to have taken root, left them there. She had to meet Lorry.

In the lobby she paused, then turned to the shoddy dining room. She spoke to the head waiter, ordering dinner sent up to her apartment—dinner for two. It would be half cold, badly served, but neither Kitty nor Severn would know it.

For a moment Dru, half cynical, half tender, regretted that the indifference of the meal she would order a little later at a table d'hôte that she and Lorry patronized would matter tremendously to her. Then, as she waited while the captain scribbled the last of the order upon his card, she glimpsed herself in the mirror. The pearls about her neck were enormously becoming; they glowed with new, iridescent beauty.

She smiled above them at her charming reflection in the glass, which smiled back in turn, and, humming under her breath, went out into the summer dusk.

## PORTRAIT

ONE half forgets, to see her go  
So rich and dainty dressed,  
She bears the past and nourishes  
The future at her breast.

She binds her hair with shining combs  
And hangs her hands with rings,  
Who is a cousin of the moon  
And prehistoric things.

DOROTHY STOCKBRIDGE.

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# The White Cape

By Frances O. J. Gaither

Author of "City of Jasper," "The Bird Cage," etc.

**W**E know more about it, I suppose, than anybody else in the world except Lane Chester himself, because we happened to be at the Mer-Bleue during that fortnight. But there's a lot we don't know. We don't really understand his Lila and never did, though we came to have a theory about her which I'll tell you a little later.

To us she seemed rather like a woman in a play. To begin with, she was as beautiful as a moon witch. And then we nearly always saw her by moonlight on some silvered piazza or walking along the shining beach with her mantle blowing about her. It was entirely white, unlined, collared in fox fur, an incomparable thing. Even the seeing her just at night, natural as that was, somehow trailed a little sinister cloud over our idea of her. And, in an effort to treat lightly a situation by no means light, we dropped into the way of speaking of her to each other as if she weren't quite real. Marjorie called her "The Woman in White" and all that sort of thing; talked to me about wishing she could see this actress or that "play Lila."

The Mer-Bleue doubtless contributed to that feeling. It's stagy. You've seen the advertisements whether you've ever chanced to see the place or not. "Mer-Bleue, the hotel with a thousand eyes upon the ocean; warmest bathing in New England; radiophone concerts daily; the Mer-Bleue grill and the green grotto where you may dine among rocks perpetually chilled by the spray

of the sea; Garski's orchestra," and so forth. The lobby is done in the Egyptian manner, columns spattered with vivid color, replicas, I think, of the columns of Prince Mehenkwetra or somebody or other. At the end of it through a tunnel of salt-encrusted stalactites and stalagmites, opens the fake grotto where one may dine, as alluringly promised, among piped fountains and varnished rocks. The effect of the Mer-Bleue is really brilliant and smashing by night, though only a garish artifice by day; altogether like a stage set.

But what happened wasn't a play. Far from it. It was life, entirely real, whether we understood it only in spots or not. And deep in our hearts we realized that and worried from the first. We cared tremendously about Lane Chester.

And talk about understanding people! We understood Chester right down to the ground. He was as clear as that little pool between rocks where he and Marjorie and I swam together every morning. There were no mysteries in Lane Chester even when he was most uncommunicative. Besides this wasn't the first time he'd set out to rescue a woman from an unspeakable situation; more like the twentieth. He was always doing it.

Last year it was that little Barry girl with thin cheeks. She had started off on her first season with a flat tire or something. Chester found her, I suppose, red-eyed, stranded in some palm-sheltered corner. Anyway he took her

up. You ought to have seen the change in her. She got to be spoken of as a whiz. Fact. Then I suppose Chester thought she didn't need him any more and he turned his attention to Zoe King. Zoe hadn't got her divorce then, and people were being beastly to her. Zoe had let it take her nerve; she stayed away from things, got to looking shabby and frayed out. Chester—

But their name is legion; the women Chester had rescued before this. There's no use cataloguing them. This is the story of how he rode to the lists for Lila. And this time was different from all the others, because this was the first time he settled on matrimony as the means of effecting the rescue.

It began with Marjorie's noticing the white cape. We two had been with Chester down to the beach to watch the moon come up out of the Atlantic. The girl was crossing the porch toward a lighted doorway just as we came up the steps.

"Look!" whispered my wife. "Do look at that white cape. It's the smartest thing I've seen this summer. Poiret, I know. See how the edges crinkle, like a water lily pad. And that collar!"

As she talked she was hurrying us forward. Chester drawled a protest.

"What're you doing, Margie? Going to snatch it off of her?"

The woman crossed the brilliantly thronged lobby and stopped at the desk.

"Hush," said Marjorie. "Come on. We can ask for letters, or something. I want to see what makes the edges crinkle."

To avoid the appearance of a pursuit, I dropped back. Chester grinned over his shoulder at me and trailed my wife. So he came to hear the colloquy with the room clerk which resulted in his, Chester's, knowledge of the number of the girl's suite, and also came to pick up the letter she let fall. I saw across the lobby the little business they made over the letter: Chester bowing over it

and she nodding thank you. It was over in a minute, and Chester and Marjorie were back at my side.

"Fancy," said Marjorie to me. "Chester could have detained her there a second, could have introduced himself as easily as not. Such a chance! That letter he picked up was from Crampton Sewell. It looked as familiar as anything to me, square gray envelope with red engraving on the flap—it fell face down. Lane even read the engraving. It was Cram's name. And yet he didn't introduce himself."

"Why scrape an acquaintance?" growled Chester.

That was Chester all over. No interest whatever in her as long as he had no hint of her being in trouble.

One evening after that he got me up to his rooms on some pretext or other. He gave me a cigar and took one himself, but he didn't light his. He just turned it between his fingers. At last he came out with this:

"Tom, I'm afraid that girl's in some nasty hole."

"What girl?"

"That girl Cram wrote to, the girl who wears the white cape in the evenings." I asked for proofs, and this is what I got. "Last night," he said, "I happened to get off on the wrong floor. Came up for something right after dinner, you know; got off on the wrong floor but didn't notice. The corridors are just alike."

Well, he tried to fit his key in a lock. It wouldn't go. So he read the number on the panels above. Seven-sixty-two. Not his door at all. Not even his floor. Funny noise inside. So damn funny he couldn't turn and walk off. A little trickling, gurgling sound with a catch in it: weeping. A woman. Being Lane Chester, he simply could not move off, but just stood there turning his paddled key over and over in his palm. And, too, the number on the door worried him. It seemed familiar. Was it

the number the room clerk had spoken to the woman in the white cape? It was. He became certain of it, absolutely. He could not move for minutes on end. Old Cram's sister maybe. That lovely woman, anyway, in some sort of trouble.

He stopped talking to take a long pull at his cigar, but it still wasn't lit. That surprised him. He took it between his fingers again and stared at it.

"In some sort of trouble," he repeated.

"Well," I said, "I don't see that a fit of tears is anything to get worked up over. Maybe she's homesick. Maybe—"

"I went back to-night, Tom, on purpose, you know, same hour; felt impelled to go. Damned if I didn't hear that same funny noise. Wish we'd spoken to her the evening she dropped the letter." He discarded his cigar, tossed it into the stand he had put at my elbow. Then he laced his fingers together as I'd seen him do a thousand times when he was planning some way out for the little Barry girl or Zoe King: made a basket of his hands and looked into it. "Marge said it was a good chance. Wish we'd taken it. I ought to have noticed a little to see if she was lonely, if she looked as if she'd like friends."

From then on, event slid into event with as much ease as if it had all been rehearsed over and over. Later that evening we three were playing bridge, worrying along with a dummy. The girl in the white cape came by us, and Chester was on his feet in a minute, his words hurrying each upon the heels of the other:

"Oh, I say, forgive me, but I'm Lane Chester. You know: Crampton Sewell's friend, Chester. These are his friends, too." He presented Marjorie and me. "You seem to be alone. Maybe you could make some use of us. We'd like it, if you could. Are you Cram's sister?"

She shook her head and drew her dark brows together as if she were try-

ing to decide exactly what Chester wanted to pull off.

"Oh, you're the one who picked up the letter," she said at last. "It wasn't my letter, though, you know. It was a letter for his aunt. I was only taking it up to her."

They looked at each other a long time. She, of course, was trying to size Chester up; only natural. And poor old Chester! I guess he was already falling in love as fast as he could. His feelings were probably a jumble of impressions of smooth cheeks, dark eyes, a perfume as insistent as gardenias or citrus blooms, and that memory he couldn't shake off, the memory of her audible weeping. Anyway, he just stood there half leaning forward in his eagerness to offer himself to her.

Marjorie and I might as well have been on the off side of footlights for all the part we had in that little scene.

"Crampton Sewell hasn't any sister," she said and began to walk away.

He insisted on keeping pace with her.

"If we could just be of some use to you."

"To me?" It was the way she said it, he told me afterward, as if nobody had ever singled her out. "To me? You mean to Mr. Sewell's aunt."

"No, to you. Let's walk on the beach and see the moon come out of the ocean."

So.

"I wonder," said Marge, shuffling the cards as they left us, "what the trouble is. Why's Lane Chester spreading a sheltering wing over her?" Margie is shrewd; no getting around that. She got worked up over the affair at once. "I don't like her looks, Tom."

"But, Margie!"

"I don't."

"Great Scott, girl. If ever a woman looked like a queen!"

"That's just it. Ever see Alexandra's picture in the rotogravure section? Or Princess Mary's? If she were entirely real, she wouldn't look so-so—"

"But you coveted her cape."

"Oh, the cape's all right. It's she, herself. She's a bit too—something. She'd seem smarter, if she didn't look quite so smart, if you get me."

Holy smoke!

"Smart!" I snorted. "What difference does that make?"

"None, of course. But anyway," concluded my wife, "I don't like her—not for Lane Chester."

To be absolutely frank I had insistent misgivings myself. But, as you may suppose, our preferences were entirely irrelevant. Chester gave us no opportunity to hint at them. Not only did he keep his Lila entirely out of our path when she came down for her brief hour every evening, but he even kept himself apart in the daytime. He stopped swimming with us in the green pool between the rocks; and for days there were no more confidences over a cigar he'd forgotten to light.

He even broke the sacred habit of bringing our mail up to us. On two consecutive mornings we sat over our breakfast tray waiting in vain for the little terrierlike sound at our door which always heralded the appearance of letters slipping under. Marjorie kept looking at the rug as she munched her toast.

"Can you imagine his forgetting? Lane!" she said astounded.

Still, we understood Chester. There was nothing mysterious to us in his sitting solitary in some corner of the Mer-Bleue's myriad porches, sitting solitary with a closed book tucked in the wicker chair beside him, and his hands hanging laced in front of him. We were not puzzled by the abstracted frown that came on his face when we interrupted his brown study to propose a sail or a game of bridge, and certainly we were not in the least offended when he declined as he did practically always. We simply took for granted the fact that Chester was bent upon a rescue. Marjorie only sighed when she saw him

following his Lila across the ballroom, her cape upon his arm, or stopping to fold it protectingly about her shoulders as they came to some outer threshold where the wind from the Atlantic met them.

We understood that we had about as much chance of deflecting Lane Chester as of turning the sun off its course. I believe he'd have followed that cape around if it had enveloped ugliness instead of beauty, and that's putting it as strongly as I know how to put it.

No, we understood Chester, who must ride to the rescue of every woman in distress. The only mystery to us was the dark and lovely Lila with whom we never held real conversation and never saw by day. The dim but shimmering whiteness of her and that almost too fragrant perfume passing along some silvered porch or beach was all that we actually knew of her, as if she were one of those drowsy, white blooms that open only at night—moonflowers, aren't they? As I said, we did develop a theory about her, but we had not even that at the very first. We had only that sense of charm—or fascination, rather, because vaguely we didn't like her—and that cloudy impression of unreality, which made us, in vain attempt at lightness, speak of her as a woman in a play. That was at first. Later came the details wherefrom we spun our theory.

The whole thing happened quickly. That, no doubt, was because it wasn't an ordinary love affair, with sunshine and sails and morning swims to temper the headiness of night hours. Actually Marjorie's amazing encounter was but a week by the calendar from the evening we first saw Chester's Lila; only five days after he accosted her and made her let him go with her to see the moon come out of the ocean. Five days, and Chester committed, body and soul, to his crusade.

That he was so far committed we should never have known, but for that

encounter of Marjorie's and what followed it.

Marjorie, drying off in the sun while I stayed on in the water, happened to drop down near an old woman in a chair under a striped umbrella, a withered and colorless old woman like a battered driftlog the sea had cast up. She was wiping her eyes over some secret affliction. Marjorie—she has nearly as strong an affinity with trouble as Lane Chester—rolled over to the foot of the chair and made herself pleasant. Before she knew it she was a confidante. The old woman was Cram Sewell's aunt, and she opened right up to Marge about a girl called Lila Boyd, who was her nurse.

Well, when I got out Marge came down the sand to me with her eyes stretched. She was terribly incoherent, but I got it that revelation was breaking over her like the white caps over the rocks that rim our pool. She was all but submerged.

"It was *she* that Lane Chester heard crying. Don't you see?"

"Slow, Marge, slow. This is tricky business."

"I'm going straight to Lane Chester."

She did, too, as soon as she could get her clothes on. I felt like a fool trailing her.

"Marge, don't do it. You've nothing but the word of an old woman, who hates her. It's plain she hates her! Chester won't believe you."

We found Chester alone, a book open in his hand. He wasn't looking at it till he saw us coming. Then he began to read.

"Lane," said Marjorie, "I've got to talk to you."

He laid his book down on the railing in front of him, got up and listened courteously while she tried to tell him. It was deuced uncomfortable. Chester had known from the first the girl was Miss Sewell's nurse. He had had her confidence all along, he said.

He seemed remote, somehow, far less uncomfortable than Marjorie. He actually tried to put her at her ease.

"I do thank you," he said. "You mustn't think I don't understand your motives entirely. Not meddlesome at all. It touches me to have you care about anything that concerns me. It's fine of you, coming straight to me like this. Took courage, didn't it, Marge?"

Marjorie, her hair all damp from her swim, her sweater sash askew, nodded up at him.

"It's tyranny," said Marjorie doggedly, using strong words to try to get it over to him. "That's what it is—tyranny. She has old Miss Sewell entirely in her power. The only reason Miss Sewell could be on the beach this morning is that she tipped a maid to bring her down while—while Lila Boyd is taking a nap. Really, she practically imprisons her. She punishes her for—  
for insubordination."

Bitterness curved Chester's lips. I thought I knew what he was thinking. He was adding this story, utterly false to him, a calumny, no more, no less, to the tale of wrongs borne by the woman he would rescue.

"Listen, Marjorie. You have imagination. Use it. Which is more likely to be a tyrant, a wealthy old woman with generations of authority at her back, or a girl with everything to lose and nothing to gain professionally by the slightest deviation from her duty?"

He was quite patient. Marjorie stared at him. Shreds of circumstantial details tangled with her wish to accept his logic.

"But, Lane, the carafe out of her reach! She puts the carafe where Miss Sewell can't reach it, hours on end, hours. Miss Sewell's throat parches with thirst. That's one of the punishments. And she knows Miss Sewell won't write her nephew for fear of spoiling his trip."

Have I ever said that Cram and Ethel, his wife, were in Europe for a year?

Chester didn't say anything for a minute; just laced his fingers into that basket and looked down into it. When he did speak, the words came slowly.

"The kindest thing to say of Miss Sewell's story to you, Marjorie, is that it is a—a misinterpretation. She is old, ill, probably broods over trivial oversights until she warps them into planned hostility."

His smile almost disarmed Marge. But she beat her sash end across her palm nervously. Chester watched her, still smiling. Good old Chester! I could see he had no charity toward the old woman, but he was trying to be kind to Marjorie.

"Oversights," Marge repeated. "But, Lane, punishments! Lila Boyd's so strong. She might even hurt that old woman."

I caught Marjorie's elbow, but it was too late. Pain darkened Lane Chester's face. It looked almost green in the sunlight.

"If she suggested anything like that, Marjorie, it's a damn lie."

He turned on his heel and left us standing there. I picked his book up off the railing.

It was that night we came upon them on the beach—late, nearly midnight. Suddenly turning a group of rocks like great sleek seals clustered on the sand, we were upon Chester and Lila Boyd before we knew it. What a picture! Beach wet and shining; water wrinkled like some titan mirror that had got scarred on the underside; she, white-faced and tense in that blowing mantle collared in fox fur, like an ice princess; he staring at her bewitched; off stage, jazz and the beat of voices and feet in the tide of sound that washes forever on the shores of such places as the Mer-Bleue. I wish you could have seen, could have heard as we did.

She, tight lipped:

"Oh, there's nothing to do. I'm just cornered, that's all."

And old Chester:

"There's one thing that can be done." Then he took her in his arms and her cape beat close around him in the wind.

We had the decency to put ourselves as fast as possible out of eavesdroppers' bounds. So we didn't hear more of what they said; but seeing was enough. One could have read by that moon. The sea shone along its wrinkles, as I have said, and Lane Chester, in plain sight of the hotel with a thousand eyes, took into his arms the woman he called Lila.

That was his answer to old Miss Sewell, to Marjorie and me, to the Mer-Bleue and the world at large. That sealed our lips, didn't it? That and the single curt announcement of his intention to marry her. He announced it next day, looking at Marjorie with steady eyes.

"I hope you will be nice to her. She's had rather a rotten deal."

Marjorie nodded.

Well! One week and one day since we first saw her, and here was old Chester, grim lipped, sworn to his mission. It made us pretty sick. Marjorie felt she had only precipitated things, and both of us were gloomy enough. You may say we ought to have trusted Chester's judgment. That's not so easy as it sounds. Maybe we could have done it if the girl had been a regular girl, the kind we could judge by ordinary standards, you know, or if Chester hadn't been so infernally ready to fling himself into any hazard when his sympathies became involved.

"We'll probably never know," said Marjorie to me, "and the thing will go on haunting us till the end of time. Imagine being with her everywhere—we will when Lane marries her—imagine it: having her to little foursome dinners and things, never knowing—"

It did look as if that wouldn't be bearable. So I dropped a hint to Chester that a little confidence was in order. It was due us, really it was. We wanted

to be fair. We wanted nothing in the world but his happiness. We'd have taken to our bosom a Haitian belle, if necessary.

"If we could hear her side of it," I suggested, "it would put us at our ease with her."

"I see," said old Chester, puffing away at his cigar. "I see." Then he was silent a long time. "I'll think that over," he said at last.

Think it over? Talk it over was what he meant. Ask his Lila how much he could tell. It came near choking me. Friends for fifteen years, and now this.

He took me up to his room next day after lunch, however, and, over the business of smoking together, tried to do it. There's no use going into the whole of his halting talk. It was less like revelation than, say, a smoke screen. There was a good deal less frankness than explanation of the necessity for reticence.

Still I did get something, enough to hang a theory on at least. He talked about professional ethics a lot, the sacredness of a trust, and this, I was given to understand, was his Lila's reason for not allowing him to talk as freely to us as she must have talked to him. Then there was his friendship for Cram Sewell. That was *his* reason, his own private reason for being an oyster.

"She crazy?" I demanded. "Is Cram's old aunt crazy?"

"Hush," said Chester.

He cracked his knuckles in an uncouth way, utterly foreign to him. Chester has good hands, gentle looking. He was all to pieces. Cords stood out on his temples.

"Well," I said, "what is the matter with her?"

He pulled his forefinger.

"Ill," he said, "ill."

He looked at me as if he were begging me not to make it hard for him.

"Oh," I said, "nervous?"

He nodded. Then with a kind of

rush: "You have imagination. Use it. Try to understand a situation where weakness forever preys upon strength, takes the vitality of another for its own. Imagine that, Tom. Put your souls into imagining it, you and Marjorie, for my sake. Imagine strength having to deny weakness its crutches——"

"Drugs, Chester?"

"Don't—don't question me, old fellow. We're Cram's friends. I can tell you only what I can."

"Oh, all right," I said, and from that day to this I've never asked him a question.

Still, I came away from his smoke screen exhibition with this much to hang a theory on:

"In such a situation," said Chester, "you don't suppose the weak person is always grateful to the strong?" I shook my head. "It might even be," said Chester, "that there would be hatred, poisonous and lying——"

So much for that. I espoused the theory he evidently wanted me to formulate. I championed Chester's Lila to Marjorie.

"Poor girl," I said, "hated for doing her duty, lied about. Damned uncomfortable situation, Marge. We can't blame Chester for wanting to get her out of it, seeing he loves her."

"Either drugs or nervousness would make Miss Sewell pretty—er—unreliable. And the secrecy," said Marjorie, using her imagination as Chester had exhorted, "is because of the Sewells. Whichever it is, drugs or nervousness, they wouldn't want it talked about. You see they won't put Cram's aunt in an institution. And that would be why Miss Boyd doesn't wear uniform—to keep the Mer-Bleue from gossiping. It really does work out, doesn't it?" she concluded cheerfully.

It did. The more we talked the thing over the more we strengthened the theory. Good old Chester.

As usual we understood him com-

pletely. We read his idea of Lila Boyd as clearly as if he had talked her over with us: beautiful; doomed to a life of petty humiliations and endless sacrifice with hate for its reward. Supposing she walked out of her present job and sought another. It wouldn't be a light thing to chuck the trust of important people like the Sewells. Might blight her whole career. Besides, would she better herself? Cornered. He had used her own phrase. "Try to think of her as cornered."

I told Chester we had a theory. He gulped and beamed on me. Seeing he wouldn't talk, I did talk; gave him the net result of our imagining. He caught my hand and wrung it till it hurt. He almost laughed in his delight that we could see the whole thing so clearly without anybody's breaking a confidence. He was as ingenuous as a child.

We'll take his idea of her, we firmly resolved. We know what it is now. We'll just take it for our own. We'll put everything else out of our minds.

Marjorie proposed walking on the beach in the evening. Chester hedged.

"I meant a foursome," said Marge. "There's no moon now, of course, but there are the stars. Mars has moved just next door to us, I hear."

"A foursome," said Chester. He was pleased. "All right, Marge. What time?"

"Soon after dinner," Marge told him. "As soon as Miss Boyd comes down."

We waited with him to watch the elevators shuttle up and down, bright behind the bronze grillwork. Chester had a line between his brows. He didn't talk. I was a bit impatient with him. Weren't we going the whole way? Weren't we taking her in?

"Big season for the Mer-Bleue," I said as another car disgorged its load and filled again.

"Think so?" said Chester, making a basket of his fingers and studying them.

She stepped out of the next car. She

had on a wan gown in which the only color was a sort of opalescent glint like the inside of a seashell. Her neck and arms were bare. She had wonderful hair and eyes, black as night. Beautiful, there's no gainsaying that.

"You'd better put this on," said Chester, taking her cape from the curve of her elbow. "We're going to walk on the beach.

She smiled at Marge and me.

"How nice."

She let him fold her cape about her shoulders, and her hands went up to fasten the collar. I saw them very distinctly. I always notice hands. Hers were large, the fingers square tipped, the back broad. Against that white fox fur they looked incredibly dark. They weren't like a woman's hands.

I stole a glance at Chester. He was looking at Marjorie. It was a chain of glances, a circle running to completion whether we willed it or not. My own glance traveled the circuit and came to rest with Marjorie's and Chester's on two strong, dark hands fastening a white fur collar. Strong hands. Strong.

"Ready?" said Chester's Lila, smiling at Marge again.

Marjorie started.

"Not to-night—soon. Another evening. Headache—I've a mean sort of headache. I think I'll have to go right up—"

I saw a flush spread from the white line of Chester's collar up his cheeks. He caught his right forefinger in his left hand and pulled at it. It cracked dully. An elevator car glowed empty beside us.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Marjorie with a little pleading gesture.

She stepped into the elevator. I followed her. As we shot upward I saw Chester touch the elbow of the woman in the white cape and turn her away from us. He bent toward her, indescribably protective, and they started to

walk off together like that, he leaning toward her. Movement made that unlined cape puff out and lift behind her.

I'm always remembering that particular snapshot of them. The brilliant lobby with its Egyptian suggestion, fretted columns bright with terra cotta glyphs and that inevitable blue, columns copied from Prince Mehenkwtre's; light spilling down through bright bowls as big as tubs on bronze chains; palms; through one thicket of them the gleam of the orchestra's instruments; off to the left beyond a vaulted opening, the famous grotto restaurant like a coral palace undersea with diners flashing among the green rocks and spray for all the world like gaudy fish; color, color everywhere; it was the season of color. Every woman shed brilliance like a gem, beryl, sapphire, topaz. That heterogeneous background stamped itself on my vision as a mosaic, intricate and dazzling. Against it I can see the sharp, cool white of Lila's cape, puffing up into billows about her as she turned away. And always of course, I see Chester, slim in his dinner coat, gravely bending toward her.

I had a beastly night. Dawn was windy. I saw gray clouds beat up the face of the sky, and I heard breakers rolling. I slid out of bed, put on my clothes, and got out without waking Marjorie. The fake grandeur of the Mer-Bleue lobby at that time of morning affected me like a slab of cold plum pudding. Ugh. I asked for our mail. No use waiting for Chester to bring it up. Three letters for Marge and one, a square, gray envelope with red engraving on it, addressed to Lane Chester and me together, a letter from Cram Sewell. I ran my finger under the flap.

I read the letter standing there by the desk with a vista of rococo columns and lumpy bell boys before me. Cram had discovered from a two weeks' old post that we were at the Mer-Bleue and he was following an impulse to ask Chester and me a favor. From the vantage

8—Ains.

of Switzerland, Ethel, his wife, had developed a hunch about the woman they'd left Cram's Aunt Mary in charge of at the Mer-Bleue.

Miss Boyd, the nurse, might be, probably was, all they had first supposed her. If so, we were asked simply to reassure Ethel so she could sleep nights.

Thus far I read with no sense of disloyalty to Lane Chester, but the next sentences were different. The minute I had read them I regretted. A definite charge against Lila Boyd, a charge and evidence.

I determined it should be as if I hadn't read it. I resealed the letter and left it with Marjorie's three at the desk. Chester would get all our mail as usual. He need never know I had read that letter from Cram to us together. I went out then and walked up and down on the beach beside the tumbling breakers.

I tried as hard as might be to forget what I had read. I meant never to tell Marjorie because I kept thinking of the time when Chester should be married to his Lila and the four of us should sit about a dinner table.

But Marjorie was up when I went in.

"What in the world?" she said. "You look as if—Has anything happened? A telegram?"

Well, I owned to the letter from Cram Sewell to Chester and me.

"Ethel's got a hunch about Lila Boyd."

"A hunch?" said Marge. "A hunch. I've had that much since I first set eyes on that white cape." True, she had. A bit uncanny, all things considered. "A hunch."

"A little more than that, perhaps," I found myself saying. "Ethel thinks she may be a thief. There was a package, a present, you know, to Cram's aunt. Well, the aunt never mentioned getting it. They had it traced. Lila Boyd had signed for it."

Then Marjorie developed logic.

"Pshaw," she said. "She could have signed for it and cut the twine and all

without being a thief. What does Ethel expect—that the nurse is to make their aunt write her 'thank you's?' What was in the package?"

"A cape," I said, "made of white Jacquard crêpe with a collar of white fox."

"What!"

Chester didn't give me our letter from Cram. I suppose that was only natural. And, when Marjorie and I swam that morning, he joined us, we thought, for the purpose of telling us that Miss Sewell gave Lila Boyd the white cape she wore in the evenings. At any rate he told us, and he rather dragged it in.

Well, there we were back at the point where the letter from Cram had found us. We knew exactly nothing. Of course, we told each other again that we should accept Chester's idea of the woman he was going to marry; and, so far as any responsibility to Cram Sewell was concerned, Chester assumed that when he choked off the letter. We could only wait. And yet somehow that letter oppressed me. It seemed disloyal to Lane Chester to remember it, but then wouldn't it be disloyal to Cram Sewell to forget it, seeing I had read it? I didn't in the least see what I could do about it, if anything at all.

Aimlessly I went that afternoon to the corridor where Miss Sewell's suite was. I walked past her doors. She was probably a crotchety old invalid, and her nurse was certainly a beautiful woman. Lane Chester would marry her and bring her often to dinner with Marjorie and me. As for me, I was a fool aimlessly patrolling a corridor of the Mer-Bleue. Still I did it three times, once at four, once just before dinner, and once afterward. It was the third trip that terminated so incredibly.

I was walking by quite briskly this time, telling myself I was an utter fool and spurring my feet to haste, because it would shortly be the hour for Lane Chester to set forth with his white-

mantled Lila for the starry beach, and Marge had vowed we must join them this time. I say I walked quickly down the corridor, passed Miss Sewell's door without pausing. Then something dragged at me, jerked me to a halt. It was a sound beginning beyond the door, a nasty sound, low, hopeless, whimpering. I looked back of me. The corridor was empty, so I stepped up close to the door and listened. Unmistakably a woman weeping. Far down the corridor an elevator stopped, and a man got out.

I'd better walk on, I thought, and let him pass me. Still I didn't move. I laid my hand on the knob and the door came open under my hand. The man down the corridor was drawing nearer. What would he think to see me hesitating there? Hardly willing it, I stepped inside the room. But I didn't shut the door. I couldn't stir. I was frozen by that wail.

"The Song of the Lark" hung on the opposite wall. It was my one distinct impression besides that of the whimpering sound: "The Song of the Lark" in banal sepia print above a woman in nurse's uniform. A paper shade pinned around the light was knocked awry so that it formed a grotesque spotlight for picture and nurse. White. Of course she was in white but that badge of her service, sharply outlined against the plaid blankets of the wheel chair in shadow beyond her, showed sinister.

"Lila," said a voice behind me. It was Lane Chester pushing his way past. His face was as white and rigid as a chalk cliff. "Lila," he cried, stammering. It stopped. The crying stopped. Lila Boyd straightened and turned. In the sudden silence details emerged for me: wicker furniture, a settee, chairs, a fern in a pot, a carafe on the table, even a magazine of the month with a crimson girl diving into an azure sea. "That weeping," said Lane Chester. "That terrible weeping."

"My dear!" Lila Boyd's lips shaped a faint smile. I thought she liked his coming in to her brusquely like that. She came straight toward him, voice vibrant with feeling. I came near liking her in that moment for her elemental directness. She plainly adored him. "My dear, I'm sorry you bothered. I'm all right."

Chester was shaking and sweat stood out on his face.

"Lila," was all he could say over and over. "Lila."

"But I'm all right, dear. Don't you see?"

She offered her face like a flower. Chester almost took her in his arms, I thought, but then, of course, he didn't.

"That weeping, Lila. Tell me."

But it wasn't Lila who answered. It was another voice.

"She wanted my moonstones, the witch. She's wanted them for weeks."

It was the old woman, but Lane Chester did not even look toward the plaid blanket wherefrom her voice sounded.

"Lies," he said. "You didn't cry like that for—for moonstones. I know. Tell me, Lila." She could tell him anything, I thought, anything with those flower-like lips so near his own. Doubt would faint under their breath. "Lila, tell me."

"She's been terrible to-day; worse than usual; terrible." Lila Boyd's words were so low, Chester bent his head to hear her better. "I've stood—oh, my dear, you can't think how much I have stood!"

The old woman broke in.

"I've had those moonstones since I was a girl. I didn't want her to have them. I didn't. And I wouldn't tell her where I hid them, either. I held out. I didn't tell. I kept from telling"—her voice broke—"even when she twisted my wrists."

Silence. It swelled fantastically toward an eternal void wherein words would be impossible. Lila Boyd mois-

tened her lips as though she were about to speak, but no sound came. Chester didn't speak either. His hands fastened on her shoulders. It must have hurt, the way he gripped her. I had never before guessed how much he wanted her.

I saw him look down at her broad hands hanging lax against her white linen skirt. Strong hands. Strong. "Twisted my wrists," beat the echo off there beyond the chasm of quiet. "Once you said such a statement was only a damn lie, Lane Chester." I tried to say that aloud. I wanted to say it for his comfort. But I was dumb, too, swept off into the void where speech was impossible. "Twisted my wrists," went on the reiterant echo of the last words spoken. And, from the table, the tiny heartbeats of a little leather traveling clock ticked off the seconds.

Lane Chester stared down at the hands of the woman he loved. She stirred in his grasp, melting toward him, wooing him, I thought, a mere ghost of a movement, but yearning. He wrenched his gaze from her hands and let his eyes travel up, up toward her face as lovely as night flowers are under the moon. She smiled, and a light flickered across his face.

"Lila!" The dumbness was broken. We were done with the silence and the insidious echoes. "Which of you was crying, dear? No, don't bother to tell me. Show me your eyes. Only show me your eyes." Her head drooped. They stood just outside the circle of light. "Look at me." He tilted her chin up and brought his peering eyes so close to hers that her head was bent backward. Again silence. "Dry," said Chester at last; only that; "dry."

Then he put her from him, all but flung her off. Hands against her shoulders, he thrust her away so that she spun grotesquely, like a marionette. Her black hair wrenches loose from its coil and went slipping down her neck, across

her bosom. She staggered, putting out her hands to him, speaking endearments, assurances; but he turned his back and strode across the room.

An hour later Marjorie and I saw from the lobby the final scene in the drama of Lane Chester and the woman he called Lila. Twenty paces from us an open doorway gave, with a breath of the Atlantic and a vision of starry sky, a plain view of Lane Chester bending over a high-backed wicker chair. He was looking down with an expression we could read as clear as print. It was tender, protecting. We saw him draw up a chair for himself and then, before he sat down, saw him pick up carefully from the balustrade beside him a cape that hung there. It was the white cape so familiar to us, and his fingers lingered along its folds in a gesture very like a caress.

Lane Chester's smile rested on the woman in the chair. He shook out the cape, held it wide. His very posture showed him eager to enfold her against

any wind life might loose upon her. The high-backed chair pushed back, and the woman rose. Marge says she felt as if we were in the midst of a fairy tale seeing the princess transformed into a changeling, for Chester, spreading that cape we had come to link inseparably with dark, young beauty, bent to fold it about the shoulders of an old woman.

At the exact moment, as if taking her cue deftly, Lila Boyd crossed the lobby. She was dressed for traveling, and her bags were borne by a bell boy at her heels. She paused a breath when she caught sight of Lane Chester. Faltering, eyes tear-marked now, too late, she seemed to us, in spite of all, pathetic, a kind of Peri in drab serge looking through that doorway to her lost bliss. Lane Chester turned the woman in the luxurious cape about and bent to fasten the fur collar under her chin clumsily, like an affectionate son or her own nephew, Cram. He did not see Lila Boyd when she passed out, although her very skirts brushed against the white cape.

**O**NE of the most interesting of the six rare tapestries of medieval France recently purchased by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., is that depicting the mythical unicorn, surrounded by figures of men and animals, purifying a spring by dipping his horn in the water. The colors of the tapestry are still bright though it has hung for many years in the Castle of Verteuil, France, the ancestral home of the La Rochefoucauld family.

**I**N the realm of music a recent noteworthy accomplishment is the translating into music of Lewis Carroll's immortal tale, "Through the Looking Glass." Deems Taylor, composer and musical critic, has caught the spirit of Carroll's delightful nonsense and, in terms of music, has painted portraits of the "waspish" *Tiger Lily*, the *Jabberwock*, the strange insects of the Looking Glass country, and of that "gentle soul with good intentions," the *White Knight*.

**T**HAT the collecting of first editions of modern authors is as much a fad in Paris as in London or New York is proved by the fact that at a recent sale a copy of Anatole France's "La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pedauque," in two volumes, printed in 1911, brought twenty-five thousand francs. It was one of a few copies printed on special paper. The illustrations were originals by Auguste le Roux.

**A**MONG the ruins of Herculaneum, which, with Pompeii, was destroyed in 79 A. D. by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, were found thimbles made of bronze, open at the top like those used by present-day tailors.

# Inheritance

By Augusta Coxe Sanderson

Author of

"Trumpeter of the Dawn,"  
"Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks," etc.



THEY were sitting on the hotel terrace looking out over sparkling Monterey Bay—Robert Fairleigh, Mrs. Stetson and Baby Carol, her small daughter. Behind them, what some one has called the rocking-chair fleet had come to safe anchor in the harbor of the hotel veranda.

Quiet reigned. Down the slope to the left gay sweaters and white trousers moved silently across the golf links. A soft breeze stirred the semitropic trees. Out beyond the terrace, with its glowing ivy geraniums and fringing palm trees, the Bay twinkled blue and gold in the sunlight, and two white sails moved steadily landward.

"Mother dear"—the baby's voice sounded shrill in the stillness—"where is M. M. Stetson?"

Caroline Stetson flashed a look of surprise at Fairleigh, recovered herself, and turned her usual calm eyes upon her small daughter.

"Why, who told you to ask me that, dear?" she asked gently.

"Mans in the card room when Mary letted me peek in. Mother dear, who is M. M. Stetson?"

"Your father, darling. Mother doesn't want you to go to the card room any more. Will you remember, dear?"

"Yes, mother dear. Where is M. M. Stetson?" she reiterated, not to be swerved from her question.

Breathlessly Fairleigh waited for Mrs. Stetson's answer.

"He is in heaven, dear," the baby's mother replied quietly. "Come, now, it is time for your nap."

"Yes, mother dear." Baby Carol slipped from her chair, and came to Fairleigh. "Good night, Uncle Fair, I'm going to have my nap." She put up her small cheek to be kissed.

"Be sure to dream of me, won't you?" he inquired, as he rose to wait while the two crossed the terrace. At the door the child turned and blew him a kiss, which he returned.

"Good heavens!" he groaned to himself, as he sat down again. "What fiend could have suggested such a question to the child? And just when her mother is beginning to get hold of herself!" He knew that Caroline Stetson had not forgotten the weeks of anxiety, following her husband's disappearance, to be sure; but she was losing the first poignancy of her fears and, judging from her answer to the child, she had come to believe that he was dead. Surely—

He was suddenly aware that Caroline was standing beside him.

"Robert, what does this mean? I found this note in my room." She handed him a small envelope. Inside was a single sheet of the hotel's stationery, and written upon it were the same words: "Where is M. M. Stetson?" There was no name, and no date. "Nurse said she didn't know who put it there and the floor maid said she had seen no one near my room. What does it mean?"

"Where is the baby?" he asked quickly.

"Nurse is giving her some bread and milk. I told her not to allow her out of sight, and that I would come back at once." Her distress was keen.

"Will you send the nurse to me when she has finished? Don't put Carol to bed for a few minutes. We must find out, if we can, who spoke to her in the card room. Now, you must not worry about it, Caroline. I can't believe it means anything serious. It is only some idiot's idea of being funny."

"Funny?" she echoed. "It can't be funny." And then she returned to the hotel.

Was that old trouble to be reopened? Fairleigh sincerely, almost prayerfully, hoped not as he waited for the nurse. His mind went back over the events of the past five years, beginning with the first time he had seen Caroline. It was about a year before her marriage, and with Robert it was a case of love at first sight—and for always.

She was standing, that first time, not far from this very spot, just across Monterey Bay, on the cliff above Capitola, looking out across the water, twinkling, as it did to-day, in the morning sun. The dark trees of Lover's Walk were all about her, and the sun-dried grass made a golden pavement.

Later, when he had met her and, after the immemorial custom of lovers, had paid court to the elderly aunt with whom she lived, his admiration for her increased. She had accepted his attentions as she accepted the attentions of one or two others, naturally, pleasantly. They sailed and danced, tramped and rode, sometimes in the groups of the summer colony and sometimes alone.

Then, one day when Caroline realized whither they were drifting, she had told him of Montgomery Stetson and how matters stood between them. Of course, Robert had said nothing further, then, but he continued to love her, and

through it all he had never changed. Only once again had he spoken. Not long before her marriage he had asked her if she really loved Monty, and pleaded with her not to go on otherwise. Then it was that she told him of the conditions she had laid down and how Monty had met them, binding her in honor to keep her word.

Montgomery Stetson belonged to that rather unusual third generation in California who had inherited, along with the abundant wealth wrung from the soil or the mines by their pioneering grandfathers, and in some cases increased by their fathers, some part of the old adventuring spirit that had brought those grandfathers to a new country in the early days. In Monty's case the adventure had been somewhat—well—diluted by his mother's stanch Quaker blood, but it was there and he was spoiled.

Caroline had not been madly in love with him when they were married, or before, but his tempestuous and persistent love-making had won out. When she had demanded that he stop drinking he did it, completely and honestly—cheerfully, too.

When, as a final condition, she had demanded that he go to work, for a year, to prove that he could be serious, he had done that, too. He had asked for a position in his uncle's firm, and had fulfilled his obligations completely and honestly—cheerfully, too, making, thereby, a good start at a name for himself. And so, as she had said when Robert pleaded with her, Monty had lived up to his part of the condition and she could not but live up to hers.

Monty had not made an altogether self-sacrificing husband. There had been occasions, more than one, in the three, nearly four, years of their marriage when Caroline faced what might have been disaster. It had been characteristic of Monty Stetson—that was the mining-grandfather strain—that pursuit,

search, prospecting, in short, was more interesting, more fascinating, than achievement, possession.

Therefore, the hard work in his uncle's firm had ceased almost immediately. He kept his desk, to be sure, but it was seldom in use. And soon after their marriage his attention had strayed away from Caroline to other women—blond or brunet. But always—that was his Quaker grandfather—they had been gentlewomen, and Monty had not gone too far.

Philanderer, dilettante, amateur, were some of the words oftenest applied to him, but even his worst friends had to acknowledge that he was clean. All of them, that is except Porter Madison, and even when Porter's statement came later he was not able to prove what he alleged. And Robert, who had been Monty's friend as well as Caroline's, knew that it wasn't true.

One evening in the early part of this summer Montgomery had come to his wife in high spirits. He had been intrusted with a secret mission—he had some very unusual friends—which concerned some jewels smuggled out of Russia by the Greek Church. He couldn't tell her anything more, he had been pledged to secrecy, but they were to be passed on to their rightful owners. He could only say that he would be gone not more than twenty-four hours. No one knew where he was going, or, indeed, that he was to go at all; not even anything about the jewels.

It was quite all right, he had told her; she was not to worry. He showed her the jewels, fabulous in their winking beauty; then he had strapped them in their bag about his waist. He had kissed her and the baby—rather absent-mindedly, she had been thinking all these weeks—taken his gun, and started.

The light of adventure was burning in his eyes, and he looked very boyish as he brandished his gun and went out through the door, smiling—and she

had never seen him again. He had dropped completely from sight.

There had been rumors, questionings, and some gossip of a not very serious kind. Many people seemed to have known of the jewels in a vague way, that he had been intrusted with them, and that they had disappeared with him.

Some one remembered having seen him by the bobbing dock lights as he pushed off from the hotel wharf in his small power boat, but had not noticed which way he turned. There was no trace, nor could the persons connected with the jewels be persuaded to come forward to help solve the mystery.

Through all the trying time Robert Fairleigh had been Caroline's stanchest friend. He had inquired tirelessly, searched diligently. All summer he had investigated every wreck along the coast, questioned every seagoing man, run down every clew suggested.

Then, when he had had to give it up, had been able to prove neither that Monty had been crooked nor straight, neither that he was living nor that he was dead—not even his launch was found—matters had settled down much as they were before Caroline's marriage. He was in love with Caroline; and, just as before, she could have been, if she had allowed herself, deeply in love with him. But there was Monty between them, and there was the little girl.

Of course Caroline knew of Robert's regard for her, any woman would, even though he said nothing, and once when he had asked her, when things looked darkest for Monty's honor, "What if he comes back?" she turned from the twinkling lights of the bay and faced him steadily. "If Monty should come back or if he shouldn't come back I am his wife—until death do us part." And Robert had questioned her no more.

"You want to speak to me, Mr. Fairleigh?" asked Mary, Carol's nurse, a comely girl of twenty or so, looking, just now, very worried. As if awaken-

ing from a dream, Fairleigh brought himself back from a far country.

"Yes, Mary, sit down. Do you know who it was—what man spoke to Carol in the card room this morning?"

"No, sir. I didn't know that any one had until Mrs. Stetson asked me the same question just now. I didn't leave her more than two minutes. I only bought a stamp at the news stand. There were only a few people in the card room. I didn't think anything would happen. I am—"

"Don't take it so seriously, Mary. Of course we are a bit interested because of what he said, but I don't believe it is anything important," he said reassuringly.

"I have been most careful, but so many people stop to talk to her, she is so pretty and so sweet."

"Perhaps she can tell us herself, though I don't want her frightened."

Mary sprang to take the baby as she appeared with her mother on the terrace. The group attracted much attention as they stood, rather isolated, at one end: Mrs. Stetson, tall and dark; the child, blond like her young father. Fairleigh, too, was fair. Mrs. Stetson had lingered on here, unwilling to leave the spot where her husband had disappeared. But she had kept much to herself and most of those who were guests earlier in the summer had gone. Fairleigh came over often from his bungalow on the other side of the bay. There had been much discussion of their affairs by the skippers on the veranda, but no gossip. Every one knew, of course, of the disappearance of Montgomery. He had been very popular, and they knew, also, of Fairleigh's friendship for them both, and his devoted attempt to clear up the mystery.

"Carol, I don't believe a great big girl like you wants to go to bed just yet. Can't you take Uncle Fair for a little walk up and down? Do you think you can stay awake for a while?"

"Yes. Mother dear, may I? I'm a great big girl now."

Mrs. Stetson smiled and nodded, and Fairleigh and the baby walked sedately along the terrace, the child clinging to his hand. Back along the terrace they trudged, chattering about serious nothings-at-all. Then up to the card room and, finding it quite empty, down along the veranda, past the groups of idling, unathletic visitors—Fairleigh, meanwhile, watching closely.

"There's the man that asked me—about M. M. Stetson!" she suddenly announced.

"Where, Carol? Which one?"

"There." She pointed; then, remembering an oft-repeated injunction, she lowered her chubby finger and nodded toward a tall, dark man standing alone.

"The gentleman lighting the cigarette?"

"Yes. He was in the card room when Mary letted me peek."

And then, though they strolled slowly past the strange dark gentleman, and Carol smiled and dimpled, he gave no sign of having noticed. The great big girl was visibly put down when she was summarily turned over to Mary to be put to bed, while Fairleigh conferred earnestly with Caroline.

"No, I have never seen him, either," Caroline told him. "He looks foreign, some way."

"I'll just find out who he is," said Robert. And after a purchase at the cigar stand and a moment's chat with an affable clerk he returned to say that the strange man was Count Vasillo-Orloff, evidently a Russian, and that he had arrived only that morning. He was apparently alone.

"A Russian?" Caroline paled. "Robert, it frightens me."

"You don't remember, I suppose, whether Monty mentioned Orloff's name that day?"

"No, I've tried so many times to re-

member every word he said, and I am sure he mentioned no names at all. He was so full of secrecy, of mystery."

"Well, I'm determined to get at the bottom of this. I think I ought to speak to him, and at once."

"Do, please do, Robert. Anything is better than this awful suspense. I shall have luncheon sent up, and stay in my room until you let me hear from you."

When Fairleigh approached the count he found him very courteous.

"Count Vassillo-Orloff?"

The dark man bowed, and took the card Robert extended. He read it, and bowed again.

"I should like a few words with you, if you are free," said Robert.

"At your entire convenience, Mr. Fairleigh." Again he bowed. "Do you speak French? My English is not very good, I am afraid. Shall we sit here or stroll down—" He pointed toward the beach.

"Let us walk, if you please." Robert answered, and when they had gone beyond earshot of the loiterers he continued: "I think you saw Mrs. Stetson's small daughter in the card room this morning, did you not?"

"I was in the card room for a short while this morning, but I did not notice a young lady—a small child, do you mean?"

"Baby Carol is three years old."

"I do not remember seeing her." The count looked puzzled.

"You did not speak to her? You did not instruct her to ask her mother a certain question?" Robert asked evenly, and for the fraction of a second he thought the other man was evading his eye, but it was only a fraction before the count looked at him squarely, and answered:

"Most emphatically, I did not." His English was clear enough, but studied and with a decided foreign crispness.

"Are you alone? I mean, are there others in your party? Please pardon

my questions—this is a serious matter to Mrs. Stetson," Robert explained.

"I am quite alone here. I came down from San Francisco only this morning. My servant, an old family servant, is with me; no one else," the count replied.

"Can you tell me anything about this note?" Robert handed it to him and, watching closely, could see nothing but puzzled interest.

"I never saw it before."

"You did not write it or cause it to be placed in Mrs. Stetson's sitting room within the past hour?"

"Most certainly not. It is not in my handwriting. See?" He produced his diary, written in a small, precise hand.

"Then I owe you my sincere apologies, which I hope you will accept."

The count bowed and Robert marveled at his calmness. He seemed not to take offense, realizing that none was meant, but it was apparent that he waited for an explanation to follow the apology.

"I must tell you, Count Orloff, that Mrs. Stetson's husband, Montgomery M. Stetson, disappeared from this hotel some weeks ago, quite mysteriously, it was, from this very dock"—he gestured toward it—"under quite painful circumstances. This morning a gentleman approached their small daughter in the card room, during the absence of her nurse, and told her to ask her mother where M. M. Stetson was. Now, no child would ever put a question in that manner, unless instructed, and she had never heard her father called anything but Montgomery or Monty. Then when Mrs. Stetson had gone to her room, much perturbed, this note was on her table. No one could be found who knew that it had been placed there. The baby pointed you out to me as having spoken to her in the card room. I can only repeat my former apology, and ask you to pardon me."

Again Count Orloff bowed and again there was, Robert thought, that insin-

itesimal hesitation to meet his eye, but he did meet it, and Fairleigh was forced to be content.

But he was disappointed. He had no solution to present to Caroline, nothing with which to calm her suddenly aroused apprehension. With another apology he was turning to leave the Russian when the latter called him back.

"In view of this—this situation, Mr. Fairleigh, I think I ought to tell you why I am here, at this hotel, just now, although I came secretly, determined to tell no one, least of all Mrs. Stetson or—yourself. I came with the express purpose of meeting both of you!"

It was Robert's turn to stare in questioning surprise.

"Those jewels, Mr. Fairleigh—you see I know about them, also—they did not belong to the Russian Church as Mr. Stetson believed. He was misinformed, duped, in fact. For generations they have been the property of the Orloffs—my family, in Russia. I have with me every proof that you can possibly require that they belong to me."

"Then, perhaps you can help us to solve this confounded mystery." Robert clutched eagerly at the first glimmer of hope. What if here was a solution which neither himself, the detectives, nor the police had been able to find? "Do you know who gave them to Stetson—who lied to him, duped him, as you say? He was certainly honorable in his connection with them."

"I have only a clew, but a strong one. I have been in this country several weeks. Russia, as you know, is in a bad state. My country is not what it was. It has been impossible for me to come before. I got out by stealth—to be frank, I have been a prisoner. In San Francisco I learned—several things. I got track of the men, Russians, they were, posing as priests, who brought the jewels to this country. In San Francisco they quarreled among themselves; two of them stole the jewels again, and

brought them down here. They found they were followed, and determined to make a—what do you call it—a convenience of your friend Stetson to get them out of their hands and into those of some new confederates. That plan did not work, and—" He checked himself abruptly.

"Go on," urged Fairleigh.

"I also met some people who knew Mr. Stetson." The count quite obviously had decided not to go further into the matter of the Russians, but to turn the attention upon Stetson. "Mr. Madison, among others, I met." He paused, as if to allow his words to have effect.

Fairleigh's self-control did not equal that of the count a few minutes earlier, for he started in surprise.

"Porter Madison?"

The count bowed.

"Porter Madison is, I am not exaggerating, one of the few, the very few people, who did not like Montgomery Stetson, but even he can know nothing of this affair. I judge by your tone that you—"

The count shrugged.

"You began by suspecting me, you know."

"But circumstances—" Robert began, but the other man interrupted.

"Just a moment, my dear Mr. Fairleigh. We need each other, you and I, in this affair we are both so anxious to solve. I want to recover the jewels. You want to find your friend, and to clear his name. I take it you are empowered to represent Mrs. Stetson. If we work together, we may succeed. But if we are to work together, we must trust each other—absolutely. Is that not so?"

Robert hesitated a moment; then he held out his hand and the Russian took it.

"Now," said Count Orloff, as they turned back toward the hotel, "I have an appointment to meet the two men, the Russians who posed as priests, at noon,

at a little café here in the village. They have promised to tell me all they know. I should like to see you again when I have talked to them, if that is agreeable to you. Mr. Madison came down to the hotel this morning. May I suggest that you see him in the meantime? I think he may have something surprising to say to you."

"Then why has he not already done so?" asked Robert. "He has had quite time enough. I don't believe he is worth considering. He went abroad quite soon after Stetson disappeared."

"He has just returned. He learned something new while he was there, he tells me."

"There!" echoed Robert. "In Europe? Then I shall see him."

"Now, as for that note, Mr. Fairleigh, I have an idea that I may be able to tell you about it later. And as for the child—" He paused.

"As for the child?" Robert prompted.

"Shall we leave that matter, also, until later?"

And with that Robert was forced to be content.

Fairleigh found Porter Madison in the dining room lingering over an early luncheon. He was almost the only occupant of the room, and had the air of one equally ready to eat an elaborate meal or blacken a reputation. Large and pompous, quite wealthy, quite worldly, Madison had always been distasteful to Fairleigh. Much of the gossip following Stetson's disappearance had originated with him; there had been nothing definite, merely innuendo, speculation, surmise, but it had grown as it traveled.

They had breathed easier when he went abroad, but now he was back and claimed to have something new, it appeared; something he had learned over there.

"Well, Madison"—Fairleigh walked over to his table, and began abruptly—"I hear you have been talking. Something new up your sleeve, eh?"

"Oh," said Porter Madison pleasantly, "you have seen the count, or perhaps—"

"I've seen the count," Robert told him curtly, and added: "Come across, now. What is it?"

"Nothing for your ear, though it may spoil your little game; I don't know. I came down to talk to Caroline, not—"

Fairleigh flushed angrily.

"See here, Madison, get this straight. If you so much as speak to Mrs. Stetson or annoy her in any way, I'll break your confounded neck."

"Oh, you will? Well, I can tell—" He paused, as if reconsidering, and then he laughed.

"Some rat has begun that already, probably because of your being mixed up in this. I might have known you had come back. You are going to talk—all you have to say—to me, and you are going to do it now. Come, what is it?"

Madison took one look at Robert's square shoulders and set jaw, and appeared to capitulate.

"I saw Monty Stetson in London two weeks ago, that's what."

"Yes?" At least he would not gratify Madison by showing his surprise.

"Yes. Assumed name, of course, woman, and all the rest of it," went on Madison, with an air of finality.

"Prove it!"

"Oh, I can prove it, all right," he said, with a swaggering air. "I was ridin' down Whitehall with Bobby Treadham, Lord Denning, you know."

"No, I didn't know," Robert said with cutting sarcasm.

"No, you wouldn't, of course. My mistake. Sorry. Good old U. S. A. you are, ha! Twist the lion's tail, ha!"

"Well, get along with your yarn."

"Oh, yes. Well, just as we got to the Cenotaph—know what that is?" Madison asked sneeringly.

Fairleigh nodded.

"I saw Stetson, with a woman. Aw-

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fully sweet on each other, too. Good looker; Frenchy as the deuce. They were putting flowers on the Cen—”

“And I suppose you walked up to him and asked for an introduction to the lady?”

Madison stared.

“I was drivin’, I told you, in Lord Denning’s motor, two men on the box. He’s no end of a toff. Stetson was walkin’, standin’, rather, at the Cenotaph. I told you that, too.”

“So you did, but couldn’t you poke him with your cane—pardon, your-eh-heh-stick?” Fairleigh poked dramatically.

“Well, by the time I made Bobby understand I wanted to stop and he had made the chauffeur understand and the chap had found a place where he *could* stop and I had got back to the Cenotaph—awful traffic, you know—Stetson was gone, lost in the crowd, and I couldn’t find him again.”

“But there was a card on the flowers, of course—I’ve heard they always put cards on over there—and his address.”

Madison stared again.

“There *was* a card, yes,” he acknowledged, “but no address.”

“Assumed name, of course?”

“Yes. Sir James Travis.”

“Then your task was easy, my boy. All you had to do was to make your way back—awful traffic, you know—and tell his lordship to tell his footman to tell the chauffeur to drive to the nearest post office. There’s one quite handy, I’m sure. You could find the address of the gentleman in the peerage directory or the court guide, or whatever it is. You’d know, of course.”

“That is just what we *did* do,” Madison admitted, “looked in them all. Bobby knew, of course. But he wasn’t in any of them.”

“And what does that prove?”

“Why, it wasn’t his name, of course. It was Monty Stetson.”

“And you expect anybody to believe such a fairy tale as that?”

“But I tell you I’d know Monty Stetson’s back in China!”

“Oh, you only saw his back, eh?”

“Ye-es,” Madison confessed reluctantly. “But I’ve got a letter here from Bobby, Lord Denning. His word is as good as anybody’s.”

“Better than yours, I dare say.”

Madison produced a square envelope from his wallet.

“You can read it, but you can’t lay a finger on it,” he announced savagely, as he held tight to the stiff sheet.

“Oh, sacred, is it? His lordship’s dear handwriting!”

“No, it’s not sacred. I’ve had heaps of letters from him. But you are not to be trusted, you’ve got too much at stake. You’ve got to read it from here.”

Robert scanned the lines on the sheet in Madison’s hand.

“In company with Mr. Porter Madison, I, Robert Treadham—Cenotaph—card with name of Sir James Travis—no such name in any list of England’s baronets or knights.” But even if I accept this statement of his lordship’s, it doesn’t prove that you saw Stetson,” he objected.

“Well, I did.”

“You’ll have a hard time proving it,” Robert assured him.

“You’ll have a harder time proving that I didn’t.”

Just then Fairleigh heard his name being paged, and turned to see the count coming quickly toward him.

“I have an appointment with Count Orloff,” he said to Madison. “You’d better come along. I want to keep an eye on you.”

Curiosity and the desire to be seen in the company of the titled got the better of Madison’s dignity, and the two men passed through the dining room.

Count Orloff met them, his former calm forgotten, his eyes flashing.

“I’ve met the men, Mr. Fairleigh,” he began, without so much as a glance at

Madison. "They've been down here a couple of days. They say they are not the ones who intrusted the jewels to Mr. Stetson, but they have evidence of what happened when he left the wharf."

"What happened?"

"Even they claim not to know, but they have found a fisherman, a Spaniard, who will take them—and us—to the place Stetson made for when he left here."

"Where is it?" Fairleigh asked.

"They claim not to know even that. But they say it is not the place their confederates instructed him to go. That was down the coast toward Point Sur, and he never arrived there."

"Of course he didn't!" exclaimed Madison. "He double-crossed them, and went to Eng—"

"There are two things necessary before we can start," the count continued, as if Madison had not spoken. "Money and a boat."

"My launch is at the dock," said Fairleigh. "It will carry twelve."

"I shall have to have a check cashed. The fisherman, as well as my countrymen, demand cash. That is why they have waited," he explained bitterly. "They have no money. I shall be with you in a moment. How soon can we start?"

"I can be ready in ten minutes," Fairleigh answered. "I must speak to some one before I go. The boat is ready for a hundred miles. Is it that far?"

"Oh, no. Somewhere quite near, they said. In ten minutes."

Fairleigh turned to the other man.

"You, Madison, I want you to come along, too."

"Not I," rebelled Madison. "I am going to have a nap. I can't fancy myself out in a little boat in this sun after a hearty luncheon."

"Well, I can. You be here, that is all. I don't propose to give you any chance to talk and I hope you'll be damn seasick, too. It'll do you good!"

In spite of his preoccupation, Count Orloff smiled and Fairleigh added that to his increasing good opinion of the Russian; that and the fact that he had, without a moment's hesitation, volunteered to finance the expedition.

Hastily dispatching a messenger to his engineer skipper with instructions to have the boat in readiness to put out, Robert went up to Caroline's sitting room.

"Oh, it isn't true, it isn't possible!" Caroline said as she came to meet him. "Porter Madison said—"

"Have you seen Madison?" Fairleigh was dumbfounded.

"Yes, he came up here."

"The cad! I hoped I could spare you that. He didn't tell me, and I thought I was heading him off."

"He said he saw Monty in London."

"Well?"

"It can't be, Robert. Other men have done such things, but I cannot believe it of him. He was no longer in love with—"

"Of course it isn't true. And this is one more thing I've got to settle with Porter," he said grimly, and then, as quickly as possible, he told her of his interview with Count Orloff, omitting no detail, and of the proposed expedition of the afternoon.

"Oh, Robert, I can't let you go! It—it is just like the time Monty set off. I can't bear it."

"My dear," Robert persisted, "if we can settle this awful thing we must. I have a feeling we are almost upon a solution."

"But if anything—the same thing—should happen!" she protested.

"It won't. This is broad daylight. I told Bradley to get Owen and his brother. They are all good fighters, and know this coast like their own pockets, and, besides, we shall be armed. There will be five, with Count Orloff, against the two Russians and the Spaniard, even if they should prove ugly. And I be-

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lieve," he added whimsically, "Madison is going to be too seasick to count either way."

"I hope so. He deserves it." Caroline smiled, in spite of her anxiety, and Fairleigh knew that she, too, did not believe Madison's statement.

"Count Orloff is not a bad lot; he is honestly anxious to get track of the jewels, of course, whether he has any legal right to them or not. I feel pretty certain that he did not tell the truth about Carol, but I believe he will. As to the note——"

"Porter wrote that note, I am convinced of that," said Caroline.

"Right you are, and I was a chump not to think of it before. Time enough, however, for that, and I do want just one good chance at Porter, no matter how this day turns out," declared Robert. And then he was off.

Down on the terrace the count was waiting. They rounded up the recalcitrant Madison who, despite his determination not to go, had laid in a large supply of lemons and dry biscuits, together with a bottle of smelling salts which a smiling clerk told him always prevented seasickness. Chewing gum, too, was good, the manicure had advised, and he had a store of that, also. His large face, meanwhile, reflected his abject misery at the prospect.

"Well, Madison, if you think all that junk is going to counterbalance the deviled crab and the strawberry short cake and the iced tea you had for luncheon, you are due for one large surprise," Fairleigh jeered, as he herded him on.

At the dock they found the fisherman and the two Russians waiting, all silent and docile after their kind. It was not difficult to understand why the Russians had failed in their endeavor with the jewels. They were not of the stuff heroes are made of; rather they were men who might easily be deceived and worsted, after doing all the dangerous part of the enterprise. The fisherman

was apparently a hard-working, honest Mexican who had come into possession of knowledge of what had happened, and now saw a chance to turn that knowledge to account with profit to himself.

The *Nymphe* was a beautiful little boat, trim and shining in every line, as she rose and fell with the ripples beside the dock. They disposed themselves comfortably and Fairleigh, as host, ensconced Madison in the stern, where he had ample room to spread, indeed, but was fated to get to the full every motion of the dancing craft.

The fisherman, as the only man of the lot who knew where they were going, placed himself beside the steersman.

"Round Point Rinos," he said, and settled back to enjoy the sun and the sea, the beautiful boat and the ease of motion.

As they turned westward Fairleigh knew that Caroline was watching anxiously as their small craft bobbed over the sunlit waves, and he wished that she might have seen the three men—it would have set her uneasy fears at rest.

In the stern, Madison's large pink face was turning greenish, his eyes were downcast, and he was industriously chewing the manicure's offering against what was in store for him.

When they had rounded the Point, and turned into the full ocean swell, Fairleigh recognized with a surge of homesickness the small point of saw-toothed rocks a few miles ahead. The Giant's Backyard they had foolishly named the place years ago, when they all used to sail down here for picnics.

It was once a small fishing village, a hamlet, rather, long ago, but it had been abandoned many years before.

It was with a distinct shock of surprise that he saw the Spaniard motion the steersman to turn into the crazy dock between the jagged rocks.

"I come here, mebbe two, three days ago. I show you what I find."

Some hours later the *Nymphe* was making her way back to the hotel, round the Point and over the Bay, now darkening under the setting sun. In her wake trailed Monty Stetson's little power launch. When they reached the hotel dock the silent men stepped out. Fairleigh dispatched Owen for the officers. Having received that for which they had bargained, the two Russians and the fisherman saluted, and disappeared in the dying light.

Bidding the engineer remain to receive the officers, Fairleigh, accompanied by the disappointed Count Orloff and the wilted, crestfallen Madison, walked up to the hotel.

Caroline was waiting in her sitting room. Baby Carol had long since been put to bed.

"We found him," were Fairleigh's first words, as Caroline came toward him.

"Monty?"

He nodded, and knew that he had no need to tell her more.

"Do you remember the Giant's Backyard? He was there."

Why he had put in there—whether for some foolish, sentimental reason connected with his tempestuous courtship days, whether he was inveigled to shore by some false signal, or whether he had been attacked in the open while on his way to Point Sur and taken to the deserted village later, to be left until some chance visitor should find him, they

did not know, might very probably never know.

They had found him lying in the little power boat, drawn in under a well-preserved wharf of the old fishing days, rising and falling with the tides, protected from sun and wind by the timbers above him, rocked by the sea he loved.

His empty gun was in his hand, in his breast mute evidence of the brave fight he had made before being stripped of the jewels he gave his life to deliver. The canvas case was still buckled about his waist, rifled and yawning.

Not all of this did Fairleigh tell Caroline, either then or later; only enough, indeed, that she might know that Monty had died as he lived, adventuring, careless of consequence, following boyishly the beckoning finger of romance, and yet defending with his life that which had been committed to his care, standing until the last, the jewel case still strapped about him and every chamber of his revolver empty. Of his grandfathers he had shamed in his death neither the memory of the one nor of the other.

"Poor, dear Monty!" Caroline repeated over and over.

"Poor, dear Monty, indeed. We all have great cause to be proud of him," said Robert, and in the tender, protecting smile bent above her Caroline Stetson might have read that she would never lack a defender.



THE present vogue for Paisley revives a fashion of a hundred years ago. For, during the middle of the nineteenth century no really fashionable lady's costume was complete without a Paisley shawl with a white-and-scarlet center for summer, and, for the winter months, one with the all-over pattern. Even brides wore shawls to be married in, and Queen Victoria wore one to the christening of Edward VII.

These lovely shawls, which were really copies of Indian cashmere patterns, were called "Paisley" because the originals were copied at the old weaving town of Paisley, in Scotland. In each pattern there was some use of the Indian pine tree sacred to the Hindus. The earliest, and most valuable, shawls reproduced the design only on one side.

# Where Lightnings Go

By Austin Wade

Author of "The Man from China,"  
"Good Hunting," etc.



"And Icarus beats up, beats up. He goes where lightnings go."

Stephen Vincent Benét.

**T**IMOTHY DERRING had found the one bit of shade, apparently, within miles. He lay at full length beneath the right wing of his plane, which stood ready for flight outside of one of a long line of hangars. The Marine Aviation Field, a few miles outside of Miami, was an aching stretch of inferno; through the glistening waves of heat the wings of the plane seemed to quiver, like those of a giant, slate-colored dragon fly.

Derring was absorbed in a copy of Shaw's "Candida." With a wet rag, which now bore little resemblance to a handkerchief, he mopped his face and neck at regular intervals, an unconsciously deliberate movement.

"All ready, sir."

Derring rose to his feet.

"Nice weather for a Mexican hairless dog," he lamented.

The cadet smiled appreciatively. He was a pleasant-faced young fellow of a type that one frequently meets and immediately forgets; inoffensive, totally undistinguished. He learned flying slowly, and had been extravagantly cursed by every instructor at the station for his painful stupidity in handling a plane. Derring only had been patient; and had, in consequence, received the rather doubtful reward of his pupil's complete devotion, which at times both embarrassed and bored him.

There was little work for the instructors at this time, perhaps two flights a day, a few students, finishing up their courses. Most of the officers had taken advantage of the relaxation of discipline following the signing of the Armistice, and came and went practically as they pleased.

Derring was neither affected nor disturbed by the letting down of certain bars. He went about his business with an imperturbable calm. Though he was acknowledged to be one of the most successful instructors at the station, his flying was not in the least spectacular nor audacious. He invariably went over his engine himself before making a flight. A leaky spark plug must be given as careful attention as a defective control. Others might leave such things entirely to mechanics. Not Derring. No one could be quite sure about his nerve in a crisis, for he never put himself in danger, never took the least chance.

Derring was one of those lucky few who are able to put up with, and even enjoy, their own society: a common fallacy is that such persons are necessarily conceited. It is rather that they possess a mind capable of judging their own thoughts, and so are spared the continual bother of seeking the opinion of the herd. But the herd, in turn, irritated because it had not been permitted to judge, takes revenge in a number of ways. So that the station made of Derring a nonentity. It professed neither to

like nor dislike him. It ignored him. But he was, nevertheless, a necessary part of the whole.

Then one day Derring inadvertently let slip a remark which made of him a distinct personality, though one to excite laughter rather than admiration. He made the grave mistake of expressing frankly a belief, which, to others, seemed ludicrously pessimistic. He was angry with himself afterward, for he would have preferred the old obscurity.

One morning, when he climbed from his plane after a flight, he had announced quite simply to the man nearest him, that he knew that he, Derring, would be killed flying. He had smiled when he said it, but his brown eyes were dreamful; the lids drooped heavily, as if he were very sleepy.

Somebody said:

"By Jove, Derring's tight!"

But Derring had walked off quietly to his quarters with an unhurried, but perfectly regular, gait.

The men, into whose midst Derring had dropped from the sky to make his amazing observation, exchanged glances.

"Well, I'm damned," remarked one.

"He couldn't have been serious," said another.

"He wasn't tight. I stood right next to him," asserted a third positively.

The story of Derring's calm foretelling of his own demise went the rounds of the station. As might have been expected, the kidding started almost immediately. Derring took it all with outward good nature, but in his heart he grew to hate it, for in some ways he took himself seriously.

On this particular morning Derring gave only a short lesson. There seemed no escape from the heat, even in mid-air. It was as if the sun sank to meet them, enraged at the trespasses of a new Icarus.

The student made an unusually poor  
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landing: misjudging his distance from the ground, he shut off his motor too soon. The plane bounced horribly, tipped, righted itself by a miracle, and continued in a series of little jounces until it eased to a stop.

"Never mind, Taylor," Derring said kindly. "Don't worry. It's only a knock. You'll get it."

Taylor was disconsolate now, like a conscientious dog that had failed to retrieve a stick thrown by its master.

"Forget it," cautioned Derring finally, and turned away rather wearily. He was feeling, somehow, completely played out. It was the heat, no doubt.

On entering the officer's mess, a peculiarly unattractive frame structure, Derring was greeted noisily.

"Still with us, Derring? We're always expecting to see you carried in feet first. Don't forget you've only about a week left to make good that prophecy of yours." The same old kidding, more insistent of late, because Derring expected his discharge papers within a week's time.

Hugh Rawdon was speaking; he was a primitive young animal, whose rather brutish face appealed incredibly to women. His features were heavy and irregular, save for low, level brows which gave to the gray eyes an undeserved depth, entirely inconsistent with the man's character. He was a big fellow for a flyer, having been forced to train down to a minimum to pass the weight test.

Rawdon's flying was as brilliant as Derring's was conservative. The fact that he had consumed a number of high balls never deterred him from making a flight, nor did a hang-over. He possessed unlimited confidence in himself and his ability to avoid a crash. Frequently he had been known to take up a copy of a current magazine and calmly peruse it while a frantic student wrestled with the plane. His theory was that it gave them confidence. It was

the station's boast that Rawdon would dare anything in the air. Of Derring the station did not boast at all.

In other ways as well the comparison between these two was to Derring's disadvantage, for he was a smallish man, scarcely over five feet six.

Rawdon regarded Derring with good-humored contempt. Now, at his latest witticism, Derring smiled rather sourly. The heat, he felt, warranted a truce for the day. But Rawdon persisted along the same lines:

"Oh, by the way, Derring, I saw the little Plant girl at the hotel last night. She asked after you and I told her of your prospective end. She promised to send something dainty in the line of wreaths."

Loud laughter here.

The mention of Jarvis Plant irritated Derring extremely. Since her arrival at the Royal Palm, one month before, in company with her mother, Derring had thought of little else. And he knew that, in spite of Rawdon's casual tone in speaking of her, he, Rawdon, was in love with her, too.

"Come out of it, Derring!" shouted Rawdon deafeningly, close to Derring's ear.

Derring came out of it. He turned to Rawdon and made a remark of a lamentably vulgar nature. Rawdon half rose from his seat. Beneath a dark coat of tan his face showed dull red.

More laughter, louder even; Derring had seldom been known to express himself so vehemently. Then Derring stalked from the mess. He stalked quite as successfully as if he had measured an even six feet. His anger lent a certain distinction to his small figure. Once outside, laughter came into his mild, brown eyes. He felt, and justly, that a subtler insult would have been lost on Rawdon.

With a last mental chuckle, Derring dismissed the matter from his mind. He went to his tent, washed, and changed

into a spare suit of whites. On his way to the gate he stopped before a row of unprepossessing, tin-roofed structures which served as repair shops for both planes and officers' cars—a convenient arrangement. Derring had rented by the week a disgraceful-looking, prehistoric automobile upon the insides of which his crew performed a continual labor of love. A perspiring sergeant informed him that there was nothing the matter with it, save that it was dying slowly of old age.

Derring had named it, and rightly, the Beast. Now, he prayed that for once it would be amenable to reason, and was pleasantly surprised, when, with the aid of a crank, it breathed fire and smoke from the wrong end, as evidence of its ability to transport Derring to his heart's desire.

Derring was lucky to-day. On his arrival at the hotel, Jarvis Plant and her mother were just coming out of the dining room. Jarvis could think of nothing better to do, she said, than to spend an afternoon at the beach. Jarvis' mother said she thought she would lie down. To Derring it seemed that Mrs. Plant was continually in, or about to be in, a state of recumbency. However, he reflected that there is a bright side of everything.

"I shan't need a hat, and my bathing things are at the beach. So let's go," said Jarvis brightly.

Though Derring was not aware of it, she was looking at him rather carefully; she was thinking that there was something uncommonly attractive about him; his face was thoughtful and sensitive, with a certain serene inscrutability, which came of an inborn fatalism. He held himself well, too, for a small man. "What a pity that he couldn't have been taller!" she thought regretfully. She and Derring were exactly of a height.

"And how," asked Jarvis, on the way to the beach, "is the dear Beast?"

"Playful. Very playful," Derring an-

swered, smiling. "I'm afraid he's something of a temperamentalist."

Jarvis laughed, an abrupt, chuckling sound. There was nothing subtly sorcerous about this girl. Her appeal was decisive, frank. She was the direct opposite of the industriously mysterious type of woman. Instead, she made use of her youth, her high spirits, and her utter fearlessness—especially her fearlessness. Neither her own emotions, or other people's, had the power to frighten her. She was an avowed sensation-seeker. She stuck her finger into every available pie, but never made a face if one particular pie were tart. She secured for herself the love of some men, the hate of others, but the admiration, grudging or otherwise, of them all.

Since her arrival at the Royal Palm she had met many men, but of them all, Derring and Rawdon survived as constant escorts. Rawdon possessed a candid surface appeal, like herself; she understood Rawdon. But Derring was different. She could not induce him to posture for her. He remained—himself; a self which she was unable fully to comprehend.

"What's this I hear," she asked suddenly, "about your killing yourself flying? I couldn't believe Rawdon was serious when he told me." Jarvis always called men by their last name, if she liked them.

"He wasn't serious," laughed Derring. "That's the station's pet joke."

"But you didn't mean it to be, Derring," she said sharply.

"No," he admitted. "I was a fool to mention the thing at all. It was out, before I realized I'd said it. You see, the feeling I had was so strong—"

"Just a minute. Let me get this straight. You mean you actually knew, at some point in your flight, that you'd be killed in a plane?" She was plainly interested.

"It came to me suddenly, as I made

the turn back from the bay to the field. I just felt it inside of me. I was as sure of it as I was of my actual existence at that moment—a curious feeling. There was no fear connected with it; just a kind of wonder that I should have been—well, notified in advance."

"But why didn't you give up flying? You could have made some excuse."

"What excuse could I give but the truth? You can imagine how the station would have taken it. I'm considered the most cautious flyer of the bunch, you know. I never take a chance. Unpleasant things would have been thought and said. I couldn't quite stand that. Besides, it would come to the same thing in the end."

"But the whole idea is so morbid!"

"No, only avoidable things are morbid. This is settled, ordained rather. So there's no need to worry about it."

Jarvis gave a little exaggerated shudder that was not entirely exaggerated.

"Let me drive the Beast, will you, Derring?" she said very abruptly.

He changed places with her, and beneath Jarvis' capable hands the Beast ate up the miles to the beach. Soon they rattled over the long bridge across the bay and came in sight of Fisher's Casino, a building chiefly notable for its strawberry-colored roof and glaring walls of white stucco.

Jarvis took no longer than Derring to change into her bathing suit, a soft gray-wool jersey piped in white.

They turned their backs on the rather ornate bathing houses and huge swimming pools, and sat together on the sand. They wished to enjoy for a little longer the anticipation of cool water. Sky and sea alike were a deep, bright blue. The water now was unnaturally still. There seemed hardly enough breeze to operate the quaint windmill painted to match the roof of the Casino. Women lifeguards stood or lounged about, displaying to a bored public disagreeably muscular portions of their

anatomy. These amazons undoubtedly were effective in their way. There was, at least, no incentive for drowning.

Derring was content to sit silently, satisfied simply to be near Jarvis. Her face fascinated him. The features were rather lean for a woman's, but the high cheek bones and firm, well-shaped mouth gave character to the face. The eyes, once seen, were not easily forgotten. They were oddly shaped, slanting almost, wise, light-colored eyes which seemed to reflect, somehow, the tawny tints of Jarvis' thick, smooth hair. She was one of those lucky blondes whom the sun burns brown.

Jarvis jumped to her feet suddenly, and Derring followed reluctantly. It had been very pleasant, just sitting there. They splashed into the water together.

"Let's really swim," cried Jarvis and swept ahead in a slow, even crawl. Derring kept pace with her. The sea was pure delight, soothing, drawing the heat from one's body. Derring dove for a moment, to reappear, shaking the water from his eyes like a sleek young seal. It was cool and green and restful down there beneath the surface. He almost hated to come up. Jarvis was swimming on her side now. Occasionally she tossed the short, blond hair back from her face. He swam close to her and, impulsively, reached out and touched her arm. It was as if he wished to assure himself of her actual presence.

"Don't!" she said sharply.

"Sorry," he said. "I only thought—" The sentence slid off into silence. At that moment Derring was acutely miserable. And at that moment, on seeing the look on Derring's face, Jarvis thought she loved him. She was greatly surprised at herself and not a little disturbed. They had turned now and were swimming shoreward. She was trying to analyze this new and most dangerous of emotions. Derring thought that she must be angry until

he caught a glimpse of her eyes, which were gentle.

On the beach again they sat and talked; about each other mostly, until Rawdon came and sat himself down between them. There was scant ceremony about Rawdon, for he was reasonably sure of a welcome everywhere. He had evidently decided to overlook Derring's remark of the morning, for he spoke to the latter civilly enough.

"You shouldn't drink and then sit in this sun," was Jarvis' greeting. "Go get yourself an umbrella, Rawdon, or you'll have a sunstroke."

Rawdon laughed.

"Never miss a trick, do you, old dear? Don't worry about me," he added easily.

"What makes you think I'm worrying about you?" Jarvis asked. She enjoyed teasing Rawdon.

"Well, you just said—"

"Oh, about the sunstroke? I was just thinking that it would mess up the beach fearfully, if you were taken suddenly. And Derring would have to look after you and I should be left all alone."

Rawdon was not pleased. He changed the subject rather abruptly.

"See that chap out there?" He pointed to a hydroplane skimming low over the water. "Well, he's a rotten flyer, and yet he makes a pile of money. It ought to be an easy game, taking up passengers. Think I'll try it out after I leave the station."

"I went up with that fellow the other morning," remarked Jarvis. "I've flown before and there's no particular thrill to it any more. They're not allowed to stunt, of course."

"You'd enjoy flying at night," said Rawdon. "There's nothing quite like it. You feel—I don't know—so damned little, up there all by yourself in the darkness."

Her eyes widened quickly with interest. For a moment she sat silently thinking. Then she spoke.

"It sounds very wonderful—to fly at night. Why, there would be handfuls of stars for the picking, and you, Rawdon, with those long, strong arms of yours—I should hold the plane steady while you reached me the moon." She had chosen her words carefully. She turned to him now, laughing excitedly. "Why can't you take me up some night from the station? You can get away with it, I know you can. I'd love it better than anything else. Please, Rawdon." She was pleading now, using all her little tricks of persuasion, her expressive eyes, that odd, effective catch in her voice.

Rawdon saw that he had blundered. He frowned.

"I can't, Jarvis. It's impossible. We're not even allowed to take people up in the daytime. When I'm out of the service, I promise you—"

But she had already turned to Derring.

"You'll do it, Derring? Won't you—for me? I want it so much, so very much." She was like a child now, an appealing, stubborn child. She had forgotten entirely that sudden, unexplainable something which had made her believe that she loved Derring. Nothing mattered now except this new desire. When this was gratified she could again amuse herself by experimenting with her emotions and his.

Derring shook his head.

"Rawdon's right, Jarvis. It would be a serious thing if we were caught—not too pleasant for you, either."

Jarvis looked from one to the other sullenly. She started to speak once, and stopped. Then, quite astonishingly, she smiled on both of them.

"Well," she said coolly, "I can see that I'll have to wait, that's all."

Rawdon grinned in evident relief, but Derring was vaguely disturbed. More, he felt, would come of this, for the gentleness had gone out of Jarvis' eyes and pale imps of ill omen danced there in-

stead. Derring had seen that look before, when Jarvis had coaxed the Beast to its limit one day on the road to Palm Beach. Now her face wore a cunning, wary expression, rather like a young fox that means to gain its desire by stealth.

She was very gay, talking amusingly of many things. Rawdon was appreciative, but Derring refused to be diverted. His attitude, the knowing way he looked at her, infuriated Jarvis. What right had this man so perfectly to understand her? She turned to Rawdon—a dear, foolish soul, and, for the present, far better suited to her purpose.

"Have you your car here, Rawdon?" Rawdon drove a great, gray roadster, with a deplorable disregard of speed laws.

"Yes," he answered eagerly. "May I—"

"Thanks, yes. I'll be dressed in ten minutes."

Derring she dismissed with a cool nod, as she moved off toward the bathing casino.

Rawdon rose and followed her, grinning like a goblin.

On the following afternoon Derring was surprised to receive a phone call from Jarvis. Would he like to take her to the tea dance at the Royal Palm, she wanted to know.

He was there at four o'clock sharp, happy at the sight of her, but vaguely mistrustful. She was tremendously smart in white-wool jersey, with a small black hat of soft straw turned back from her face. Her manner was gracious and she gave him both her hands, a pretty gesture of welcome. Derring gave a mental sniff; surely there was a mouse hereabout.

She led him directly to several secluded seats on the rear porch of the hotel. She seemed to have entirely forgotten the tea dance. Each was doubt-

ful of the other, maneuvering cautiously, sparring for place. She encouraged him to talk of himself and, in natural sequence, of her. Time passed.

"Would you like me to tell you that I love you, Jarvis? It would be rather like telling you that water runs down hill." He was smiling rather whimsically.

She gave her abrupt, bright chuckle.

"But we have only the word of estimable, but unromantic scientists to prove that point. For my part, it amuses me to believe that water occasionally deviates from the commonplace and runs uphill." Jarvis could talk the most charming, inconsiderable nonsense. She continued more seriously: "Well, I admit I knew that you loved me, Derring, but love is a variable term, at best. Can you define it for me?"

"No," answered Derring, wearily rather, "I've not felt it long enough, I think."

"Or often enough," suggested Jarvis slyly. "If one loves infrequently one loses the knack of it. And it is a knack, Derring, if one wants to come out of it as one went in."

"I don't want to come out of it," he said sullenly.

"You've not even asked me if I loved you."

"I'm not going to." He was very positive.

"You might take a sporting chance, Derring," she urged. "After all, I can't very well offer you my heart and hand. To do so would show a lack of subtlety on which I pride myself." Her eyelids had drooped suddenly, for again the imps were dancing.

"If you mean that you care for me, Jarvis, I shall not believe you. But if you'll marry me, I'll do my best to keep you from regretting it." He spoke with a simplicity which she found baffling.

"Dear, dear Derring," she said very softly. "I mean both."

Still he did not entirely believe her,

but was nevertheless ineffably happy. Jarvis regarded him wonderingly. She felt a sudden high pride that she could bring to the face of any man the look on Derring's face. She was very sure of him. And so she waited.

After a silence he turned to her.

"Oh, Jarvis!" he cried with sharp feeling. "Ask me for something—"

"I want just you," she told him with an old wisdom. But still he insisted, demanding that she should ask something of him, anything, so that he might prove himself.

Jarvis hesitated. This was not quite the time, she felt; it was too soon. But here was a chance which might not come again. He was playing directly into her hand. Well, she would risk it. There was always Rawdon.

"Why, dear, there's nothing I want—but, oh, yes, there is something." She straightened in her chair, stiffening a little.

"Tell me!"

"It shall be an engagement present, Derring—what I want more than anything. Take me up for a flight at night!"

Immediately Jarvis saw that she had made a mistake. He did not speak at first, merely looked at her with a full comprehension.

Jarvis, angry with him and still more angry with herself, spoke first.

"So you're going to back out!" Her wise, contemptuous eyes regarded him coldly.

"That's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm not in the habit of shutting my eyes to facts. At least, I can thank you for a glimpse of very great happiness," he added more gently.

She was white now, with anger and disappointment, wounded pride, too, for had he not said he would do anything? There was a raw edge to her voice, and the words came quickly.

"Before you go, Derring, you may as well know that I was simply trying you

out, testing your nerve, and the—er—depth of your regard for me. You came through it rather poorly. As for the flight, that's already settled. Rawdon has promised to take me up." Her eyes shone with pleasure, for she saw that she had struck deeply.

"But he can't," said Derring at last. There was a kind of pathetic puzzlement in his voice. "Why, he can't," he repeated, as if to reassure himself.

"You know that he will," she said evenly. "He's given his word. Rawdon's an audacious brute," she added cruelly.

Then Derring left her. With mingled feelings of triumph and regret she watched him turn the corner of the hotel. He was gone, the one man who had understood her so completely and—inconveniently. She had lied, of course, about Rawdon; she had tried the more difficult of the two men first, and in doing so had paid Derring a considerable compliment. But she meant to have that flight, at any rate. She had thought of little else since Rawdon's unfortunate remark. Before that, she remembered vaguely, something of a different nature had occupied her mind. What was it now? Oh, yes, she had been in love with Derring, because he had understood her; and now she was sure that she hated him for the same reason. With a kind of mental shrug, expressing her disregard of life's playful complexities, Jarvis went to dress for dinner.

Derring, curiously tortured by the green-eyed one, had gone in search of his unsuspecting rival. Consequently, as Rawdon was leaving the tiny bungalow on the outskirts of Miami which he shared with a fellow officer, he was somewhat surprised to see the Beast jerk to a halt before the curb.

"Rawdon," said Derring without preliminaries, "I want to speak to you."

A little frown gathered between Raw-

don's level, dark brows. He did not like Derring's tone, and besides he was already late for a dinner engagement.

"Well, be quick about it, Derring," he said sharply.

Derring ignored the remark.

"Is Davis in?"

"No, but what—"

But Derring had already entered unbidden. Rawdon followed, his irritation increasing.

Derring faced him.

"I'll be brief, Rawdon, it's just this: You can't get away with taking Jarvis up for a flight at night."

"Who said—" Rawdon's voice was puzzled, but it changed suddenly as the dictatorial quality of Derring's remark was borne in upon him. "What the devil do you mean, Derring, by telling me what I can or cannot do?" Then, as Derring stiffened perceptibly, he added: "I'll take Jarvis up any time I want to. If I get caught, it's my own affair. Now, get the deuce out of here. I've got a dinner date." He moved forward, as if to push Derring through the door.

Then Derring, the conservative, behaved in a curious fashion. He struck Rawdon suddenly, without warning, and the crested ring on his hand cut the other man's cheek. At first Rawdon stood quietly. There was blood on his hand, where he had touched his cheek. On his face was an expression of almost ludicrous amazement. Then he threw back his head and laughed—a laugh of sheer amusement. The situation was certainly absurd, besides being rather pitiful. Derring's gray face would have been appalling, had that face been on a level with Rawdon's own.

Again Derring struck out and this time Rawdon parried the blow. Step by step he backed Derring against the wall. Then, when he could go no farther, Rawdon held him with one hand quite easily. With the other he slapped him, first on one cheek, then on the

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other; sharp, painful slaps, which brought the blood rushing hotly to the surface. Derring struggled, of course, but futilely. Rawdon had held an amateur boxing championship before the war, and he had never permitted himself to become soft.

Then, abruptly, Rawdon let Derring go, and stepped back away from him; for a queer, unnatural noise came from Derring's throat; and to one who has never heard it before, the sound of a man's sobbing is peculiarly unbearable.

"For Heaven's sake, Derring, stop that!" There was earnest entreaty in Rawdon's voice. He made an inadequate movement toward Derring, for he felt an unreasonable desire to throw an arm about the shoulders of the other man. Then he said: "Here, Derring, there's been a mistake somewhere. Believe me, I never said I'd take her up. It was your manner that made me sore. Let's forget it!" Rawdon was horribly embarrassed. He felt that he was verging on the sentimental. He held out his hand. Derring gave him one look, in which there was neither trust nor friendliness. A heart-shaking humiliation had made him dizzy. But he took the outstretched hand, because he could think of nothing better to do.

There was an uncomfortable silence.

"Have a drink," suggested Rawdon, with exaggerated heartiness. He produced a bottle of Scotch and two glasses from his bedroom, and poured out two stiff drinks. Derring swallowed his gratefully. The stuff warmed him and took the edge off his shame.

"I'll have to rush," Rawdon explained, as he slipped into a fresh tunic. He was the apologetic host and Derring was a welcome, though inopportune, guest.

Derring, sane, would have found Rawdon a likable chap.

On the following evening Rawdon dined at the Royal Palm with Jarvis

Plant. Jarvis was alone. Mrs. Plant was in her room lying down. She had been feeling "twitchy," Jarvis said.

Rawdon had had a number of drinks which gave him a pleasantly masterful feeling. Pity poor Rawdon, who was no student of feminine psychology. It simply never occurred to him that Jarvis would lie to either Derring or himself. So that this blond expert in mental gymnastics found him in a highly receptive mood.

To-night Rawdon had decided to risk a proposal. Through dinner he became nervous, and the dissipation of his liquid courage filled him with misgivings. Having no appetite, he ate little at first. Then, fearing that this was too apparent, he fell to suddenly and gorged himself. The butter sauce from the asparagus splashed on his tunic, making a small, but perfectly discernible spot; of this he was hideously conscious, and mentally consigned the offending vegetable and its tricky accompaniment to the devil.

But all suffering eventually comes to an end, and Rawdon's ceased abruptly when, after dinner, Jarvis led him to two secluded seats on the rear porch of the hotel. They sat for some minutes in silence. Jarvis was stage manager and leading woman combined, in her own private little theater. Just now she was allowing her setting to have its effect.

The night was clear, with quantities of stars, but, as yet, no moon. Palm trees threw bold, sweeping shadows, and the waters of the bay gleamed darkly. A stealthy breeze carried the heady scent of magnolia. Across the sky the milky way trailed its nebulous, pale luster.

One of Jarvis' small hands fluttered toward it. She spoke musically.

"It's so pale and clean, Rawdon—the street of little worlds. I think, somehow, that if one could only wash in it, one would become quite, quite good.

which," she added dryly, letting the pose drop, "would make life exceptionally dull."

Rawdon felt that he should laugh. He said, instead:

"Jarvis, are you ever serious?"

"When the occasion warrants it." The irony of this escaped him as she intimated that it should.

"Jarvis!" He had risen to his feet and was standing before her. "I can't think of anything but you. You've got to marry me." He caught both her hands and drew her to her feet. "I love you," he said thickly, with striking lack of originality. But he kissed her without asking her permission which, after all, is the only way to kiss a woman. Her arms were about his neck and she was whispering to him delightfully intimate, soft phrases:

"Dear, dear Rawdon, I *do* love you."

Rawdon, triumphant—always, in his own mind, the dominant male—became suddenly calm before this girl's emotion. He patted her shoulder, soothed her as one would a child. With her face hidden from him, how could he know that the imps were dancing?

At last she disengaged herself. He held her off and looked at her, with a very pardonable pride.

"You wonderful girl!" he said slowly. What he meant was, "You're a wonderful fellow, Rawdon, to have captured such a prize."

"Wait for me," she said to him. "I'll be back in a minute."

When she returned she carried a silk knitting bag, from which she produced a good-sized silver flask.

"Mother's," Jarvis explained. "She always carries it in case of illness." She unscrewed the flask. "This is to celebrate our engagement, dear, but after this evening I want you to promise me to give it up. I'm sure it must be bad for you."

The maternal note in her voice pleased him and he gladly promised what she

had asked. Now, however, he took the flask from her with ill-concealed eagerness. He smelled of its contents.

"But, Jarvis, you can't drink straight Scotch!" he protested.

"I'll only take a sip," she assured him. But it was a liberal sip. "To our happiness!" she said slowly. Then Rawdon drank in long, nervous gulps, not minding the burning head of the stuff as it went down. He was, he felt, happier than any one man has a right to be. And this was his last drink.

In ten minutes the flask was empty and a roseate haze had settled upon Rawdon, through which he viewed with an increasing, tender solicitude the world at large. Jarvis had remonstrated with him finally. She had meant only to induce a state wherein Rawdon would be amenable to reason.

"Let's go on a party, Jarvis." His voice was steady.

In the darkness she could not see that he was trembling with a certain vicious excitement.

"Where to?" she murmured tentatively.

"That's up to you. Anywhere at all."

"Do you mean that?"

"Of course," impatiently.

"Then take me up for a flight tonight. It would be a wonderful engagement present—something to remember all our lives. Will you, Rawdon?"

He didn't even hesitate. In his exalted mood the romantic picture she had presented appealed to him irresistibly. "Something to remember all our lives."

"I'll risk it," he announced, half to himself. Then, worriedly, for his brain still functioned after a fashion. "But it's not going to be easy."

"What are the difficulties?" She was very practical all at once.

"Well, the damned sentries, for one thing."

"Can you get a plane out of the hangar by yourself?"

"Yes, with any luck, I can taxi out.

There are no doors to the hangars, just canvas flaps. It'll make an ungodly racket, though."

"They'll be sure to hear you, then?"

"Yes. But I can get away with it," said Rawdon, with a large conceit. "The old man's a great pal of mine." As a matter of fact the "old man," otherwise known as Major Sterling Goddard, did not share the station's approval of Captain Rawdon's spectacular flights. His was a sedate, conservative personality and he judged that some of Rawdon's daring exploits were slightly indecorous. He would have been the first to condemn the taking up of passengers, either by night or by day.

"What would be the worst they could do to you?" Jarvis asked curiously.

"Oh, a few weeks restriction to the station," answered Rawdon, with dangerous euphemism.

"And where could you pick me up?"

His thoughts were more labored now, and the words came with a difficult precision.

"The polo field. You know, near Fisher's Casino. Houses near there. Keep out of sight till you hear me land."

"How soon?" she asked only.

"As soon as I can make it. About half an hour."

A minute later, in the lighted lobby of the hotel, his eyes worried her. They were unnaturally, feverishly bright. People looked at them. She hoped desperately that Rawdon wouldn't stagger. He did, a little. Taking his arm, she hurried him along. Standing in the main hotel entrance, she watched him go slowly, carefully, down the steps of the porch. Fortunately the roadster was parked near the entrance. Rawdon started the engine. The car leaped forward with a jerk and shot off down the road at perilous speed. Once it swerved hideously as Rawdon turned almost completely in his seat and waved to Jarvis.

It may be said for Jarvis that, even

then, she felt no fear at the thought of the prospective escapade; no idea of backing out ever entered her head. By means of certain insidious methods, she would very presently attain her desire. It would be hugely worth while, this new sensation. Then, she supposed, she would have to set about breaking her engagement to Rawdon. Her mind reverted to Derring.

And Jarvis' thoughts of Derring were not charitable. He had refused her what he undoubtedly had the power to give her. Why, Rawdon had just now admitted that the worst that could come of it all was a two-weeks' restriction to the station; not such a horrible punishment, surely. She reflected, hotly now, that she had almost made up her mind to remain engaged to Derring. And then, on a sudden angry impulse, she went directly to the telephone booths, and called Derring's number. She scarcely expected to find him in at this hour, but it was worth a chance.

Knowing no one with whom he cared to share a bungalow, Derring boarded comfortably in the heart of the town. He found it more convenient. This evening he was reading and he threw down his book rather impatiently to answer the telephone.

He had been expecting Taylor to drop in shortly and they were going to the movies. This was probably Taylor now, he reflected, as he lifted the receiver off the hook.

Then a familiar voice asked brusquely:

"Is that you, Derring?"

"Yes, this is Derring." He was, as always, mistrustful.

There was silence for a heartbeat:

"Well, I'm going to fly to-night. I thought possibly you'd like to know," the voice continued.

Derring's hand clenched on the receiver.

"Where from?" he asked coolly.

"Never mind where." She gave her abrupt chuckle. "But there's one thing more. I'm engaged to Rawdon. Be a good sport and give me your blessing."

"You have my most sincere——"

"Good wishes. Thanks, old dear. Good-by." She was gone. Derring hung up the receiver so that it clattered. So the seemingly ingenuous Rawdon had lied, after all! Derring found himself hoping desperately that Rawdon would get a general court-martial.

The expression on Derring's face could hardly have been pleasant, for Taylor, entering at that moment, asked immediately:

"What's the matter, old man? Feeling badly?" Away from influence of the station's precise etiquette, these two treated each other with easy familiarity. Derring had finally resigned himself to what he considered Taylor's absurd preferences, and had grown honestly fond of the younger man. A number of confidences had been exchanged.

He answered Taylor shortly, however.

"Rawdon's taking Jarvis Plant for a flight to-night. She threw me over because I wouldn't."

"Damn Rawdon!" Taylor swore angrily in defense of his idol. He approached Derring, and, abruptly, diffidently, put a hand on his shoulder—a movement of extraordinary gentleness. "I saw them at the Royal Palm to-night. I wasn't going to mention it. I'm beastly sorry."

"Tell me about it," Derring said quietly. Even now he loved to talk of Jarvis.

Taylor hesitated.

"I—they were in the lobby when I saw them." Derring was quick to see that Taylor was holding something back.

He spoke sharply.

"Well, let's have it."

Taylor was uncomfortable. He wished that he had had sense enough to keep his mouth shut. He was afraid

now, of the possible results of what he was about to say.

"Well, Rawdon was pretty tight."

"What!" Derring had risen; his eyes had contracted to twin points of light.

"You know how Rawdon gets. She had to take his arm to steady him. I followed them out and saw him drive off like blazes in that gray car."

"He's taken one chance too many," Derring said harshly. "He's trifling with her life as well as his own."

"It's not as bad as that—he's often flown when he's drunk."

But Derring had very quietly made up his mind. Now, he said very little, but he acted quickly.

"I'm going to do what I can to stop this." He reached for the phone and called the station—headquarters. "Hello, this is Derring speaking. Captain Rawdon is going to try to take a plane up. He's in no condition to fly. See if you can—yes, you'd better hurry. Good-by." Then he turned to Taylor. "I can't take a chance on their catching him in time. It'll have to be explained to old Goddard and he's infernally slow. Come along." He did not add "if you want to," for Taylor was at his heels as he ran down the flight of stairs.

The Beast stood parked by the curb. Taylor took the crank that Derring handed him and turned over the motor. By a miracle it started; and Taylor jumped in as the car slid into high.

Taylor never forgot that ride. An unfamiliar Derring was at the wheel; a wildly irrational being, who drove at full speed through the main streets of Miami. And then the road along the bay lay white before them, and the Beast reared through the night. Once Taylor thought that he heard a familiar sound throbbing in the darkness above them, the sound of an airplane motor. Derring heard it, too, and took a curve at a perilous angle.

"So they didn't catch him in time!" he said between set teeth.

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Then, at last—the bridge over the bay, creaking and groaning beneath the furious passage of the Beast, and Fisher's Bathing Casino, its white-stucco walls looking weirdly unreal in the starlight.

Derring jerked the Beast to a stop and throttled the motor down without stopping it entirely. Now, only, did Taylor question him.

"You'll think he'll land near here?"

Derring was out of the car and was making his way rapidly toward the back of the Casino.

"Shut up!" he whispered viciously, and added: "It's the only place he can land—the polo field. If my guess is correct, she's here already waiting for him."

"What are you going to do?" Taylor kept his voice carefully lowered this time.

"I don't know. But be ready for anything." And Derring broke into a run across a stretch of sand, on the other side of which stood several bungalows to the east of the polo field. Lights showed from the windows of two of these, but a third was in darkness, obviously unoccupied. Derring slowed his steps, and, keeping well in the shadow, the two proceeded cautiously to encircle it. Then, as they turned a corner, a figure rose up from the sand and stood coolly waiting for them to approach.

As they faced each other, Jarvis and Derring were outwardly calm. But Jarvis raged inwardly at this attempted interference with her plans, and Derring at the lack of concern with which she risked her life and Rawdon's.

Taylor stood to one side; he felt, somehow, that the situation was a mite too theatrical; that, after their little scene was finished, both actor and actress would exchange smiling pleasantries and end by having dinner together.

Jarvis wore a long wrap, which completely hid her slim figure. Over her

small hat she had thrown a dark veil, which, at sight of the two men, she had lifted from her face. She was smiling, though not with amusement.

"You're not going up," announced Derring simply. There was something inexorable about his voice which infuriated her.

"Don't be a fool," she said coldly. "Besides," she added practically, "even if you should in some way prevent my going up to-night, there is always tomorrow night, and the next. Sooner or later I'll have my flight, and with Rawdon. I'll find a way."

"So you've quite made up your mind to make this insane flight! You know Rawdon's drunk, I suppose?"

"I'll take my chance," she said stubbornly. She had become slightly nervous, and was looking this way and that.

Again, nearer now and louder than before, came the sound of an airplane motor. Nearer, always—almost directly over their heads. Rawdon was maneuvering for a landing.

"Listen!" she cried, her eyes glowing with the thrill of it. "He's come! Now," she added fiercely, "get out of my way!" And she made as if to pass Derring.

What followed took place so quickly that Taylor obeyed Derring's whispered orders in a kind of daze.

"Your handkerchief, quick!" Then: "Here, help me hold her."

Jarvis had been completely taken by surprise. She had started to scream once, but the scream had been choked into an inarticulate, soft sound, as Derring's hand closed about her throat. In another minute the gag was in place, and she was struggling in the arms of a stranger.

At the same moment a dark, winged shape rested on the polo field. Rawdon, despite a brain reeling with dizziness, had made a perfect landing.

"See her safely back to the hotel, Taylor," Derring said.

Seated in the cockpit of Plane No. 24, Rawdon looked out over a deserted stretch of turf. As far as he could see there was no one. The thought entered his mind that Jarvis might not have intended coming and he swore to himself, for it had been a difficult business from the start. He had timed the thing nicely, so he had thought, and had slipped into one of the farthest hangars when the sentry had been at the other end of his beat. But as he taxied out into the field, there had been voices and people had come running. It was almost as if some one had known. He had taken off successfully and here he was at the appointed place and no Jarvis.

But now a small figure came running toward him seemingly hampered by a long enveloping cloak. She wore a veil, too, he noted with approval, for he had not thought to bring her a headpiece or goggles.

"Get here—all right?" he shouted above the noise of the motor. It was the question she should have asked of him. She merely nodded. As he leaned out to help her into the seat behind him, he was conscious of a stabbing pain in his head. He sat back rather limply. She did not seem to need his help, but had scrambled agilely into her place. It was just as well, he thought, that she should not know of this pain in his head; it could not possibly last and it might frighten her. It was too bad, too, that he could not properly enjoy this flight, which was to have been Jarvis' engagement present—"something to remember all our lives," she had said.

His hand fell heavily on the control and No. 24 swept along the length of the polo field, to rise in the air triumphantly just as it seemed about to crash into the goal posts. The darkness was all about them now, comforting, somehow. But the pain in his head was making him drowsy, a sort of dull ache. He longed to close his eyes for a moment. Well, at any rate, Jarvis was

enjoying her dearest desire. It was chill in the air to-night and Rawdon found himself shivering.

They were over the bay now, a placid sheet of shining water, serene in its still beauty. And there, above them, spread the "street of little worlds," of which Jarvis had spoken. It seemed absurdly near, and, too, the stars were behaving in an erratic fashion, Rawdon thought. It was as if they were scurrying about the sky, in an effort to form new and curious constellations. This stupid pain in his head was, no doubt, responsible for their unusual behavior.

Rawdon banked the plane slowly for the return trip. He wondered vaguely of what Jarvis was thinking. He hoped that she was not disappointed—"something to remember all our lives."

And behind Rawdon sat a still figure, grimly rigid; inexorable, like Fate itself.

Death came very swiftly to Rawdon and his companion—so swiftly that Rawdon failed at first to recognize its presence; felt only a kind of vague wonder at the sudden lapping tongue of flame, which shot up before him. But Derring knew, and in that instant lifted Jarvis' veil from his face to view his sky world for the last time—a fascinating, limitless void which he had hoped, in a measure, to explore.

Suddenly Rawdon's mind cleared; a great fear took hold on him—Jarvis, terrified, helpless. His fault. All his fault.

He forced himself to look at her, and, turning, met the calm eyes of Derring. Derring had known the end for a long while, and faced it serenely.

Rawdon gave a sharp little cry of relief. He was no longer afraid.

Then—a loud explosion, sounding, somehow, less loud than it should have, considering the cost, and the fast-crumping mass, which had once been plane No. 24, plunged steeply downward in broken curves, blazing a red path for its

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own descent. The waters of the bay received it hissing, but in a short time covered it with merciful ripples.

The death of Captains Derring and Rawdon was a great blow to the station, and the circumstances surrounding their death were assiduously withheld from the public; a short circuit in the wiring had fired the gas tank, which had exploded in mid-air. That was all. The bodies had not been recovered.

Major Sterling Goddard knew what he knew. But he cautioned his subordinate, who had received Derring's telephone call a short half hour before the "accident," to keep his mouth shut. The station at large knew that a warning had come of Rawdon's intended flight, but they did not know from whom. It was a curious fact that plane No. 24 had been deemed unsafe, and that the engine was to have gone to the shop for a thorough overhauling on the day following the crash.

As for Taylor, he performed that which was requested of him; but not before he had stood, supporting an hysterical and nearly fainting girl, and watched in stark horror the flight and fall of No. 24. After the plane had risen, he had removed the gag, and she had flung away from him proudly, until he caught her wrist and held her. And then they had waited. A heart-shaking silence was about them, save for that throbbing, regular beat somewhere above them in the dark.

High in the air a flaming spurt of fire, a dull, sickening roar, and the dizzy descent of a monstrous, man-made meteor.

Taylor had turned to Jarvis and spoken one pitiful, brief sentence.

"He loved you, Jarvis." His use of her first name was entirely unconscious. There was accusation in his voice and a kind of horrified loathing.

She was trembling violently, though not with cold.

"I think," she said softly, "that I'm going mad."

Taylor laughed at this, a raw, ugly laugh, in which there was no mirth and a great deal of pain.

"Come on," he had said curtly, and led the way back to the car. Reluctantly she climbed in beside him. His presence terrified her, as he knew that it would. She, who had never been afraid, shrank from this man who had been Derring's friend. And now she felt the need of comfort, some one to whom she could tell her version of the affair. She went quickly to work to manufacture one, during which occupation she sighed once softly as if she were very tired, and crumpled in her seat. This was, perhaps, her most potent, her only argument.

Taylor stopped the car, of course, but with a curse. He found himself regarding her curiously. It was, after all, impossible that she could have been entirely responsible. Here, surely, was no vampire. She seemed infinitely young, and that drawn look about the childish mouth was peculiarly pathetic. There was peril in the tired droop of her slim figure, in her very unconsciousness. Her lashes, too, were unnecessarily long and soft and dark. The blond, thick hair was in disorder.

He began to slap her hands rather futilely and was on the point of going in search of a restorative, when she lifted her head weakly and half opened her odd, light eyes. He shook her gently, and her head fell forward again against his shoulder. It was a movement of utter exhaustion.

And Taylor, who was one of those chaps one frequently meets and immediately forgets, but who had loved Derring as much as one man can love another, comforted Jarvis with small, ineffectual words; after which he permitted her to dispose of her surplus emotion within the protection of his capable arms.

# The Whisper

By Rice Gaither

Author of "Pardonning of Belliard,"  
"We're All Civilized," etc.



FROM staring down upon the lesser heights of lower Manhattan, Hal turned to read the card of Mr. Francis I. Drake. It was difficult for him to put his mind on the engraved white oblong, because he was facing problems of which the sum was money. Where was he going to get the money for the branch in Detroit? Hadn't he gone the limit at his own bank, and would any other bank be likely to accommodate him? And if he didn't open the branch in Detroit, hadn't he just as well close down the factory in Jersey, and let the business go to his competitors?

"I'm too busy to see Mr. Drake," said Hal, not bothering to translate his refusal into polite apology.

The boy lingered, as if he were loath to be the bearer of curt messages to any one so elegant as Mr. Drake; and Hal, struck suddenly by the incongruity of Ducky Drake's appearing at anybody's business office, particularly at the tea hour, found himself smiling with indulgence and amusement.

"It won't take a moment, he said, sir," the boy was pleading.

"All right." Hal shrugged.

Ducky, in faultless morning coat, closed the door softly behind him, possessed himself of a chair, and with the point of his cane began digging the

green velvet of the carpet. Hal, listening absently to his talk of people and polo and Palm Beach, wondered a little how Ducky managed it all, without a business or family to back him. Toiling not and spinning never, he was a sybarite beyond compare.

"I say, old man," Ducky broke off suddenly, "you couldn't let me have a thousand, could you?"

At this suggested answer to all his questions, Hal laughed mirthfully; and then, at his own inability to meet the embarrassed request, sardonically.

"Things are a little tight with me," he managed to reply, as carelessly as if he were not speaking the deadly truth.

"Oh, well, no matter," Ducky said, quite evidently not believing him. "Thought money might be free with you —right now," he added curiously. Hal wondered what he meant. Evidently nothing, he decided, as Ducky went on talking, talking of Lewes this time. "They say Lewes was well fixed. I wonder whom he left his money to? Fine fellow, Lewes. And very fond of you. You and Lucile."

Hal flushed at that, and rose. He couldn't sit there talking with an ass. He couldn't have his wife's name spoken by an ass familiarly. He frowned, looked at the door.

And Ducky rose.

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"Maybe you'll have that thousand yet," said Ducky. Then, irrelevantly: "She was mighty good to him, staying with him on the day he died."

Hal slammed the door and scowled at the ground glass. Ducky was a well-intentioned ass. Yet something he had said echoed like an unpleasant whisper.

There were more pressing people. There was the sales manager waiting, intent upon the Detroit branch, and threatening to resign unless he got it; then, afterward, there was the treasurer to remind Hal that his biggest note was due and running along at the will of the bank. There was, in fact, a whole series of annoying conferences. Hal would have to get more money from a bank that held his note for more than he could pay. Or he'd have to give up the idea of the Detroit branch. If he had to give up the idea of the Detroit branch, he couldn't sell the output even of the plant in Jersey. And if he couldn't sell the output—Hell.

On his way home, however, he managed to forget worries almost completely. Lowering a window of his closed car and buttoning the fur collar of his coat about him, he breathed in the cool air of evening.

He loved that drive, from the very moment his motor swung into the smart procession of Fifth Avenue: the lines of silent motors with the soft shine upon them; the red, green, and yellow of the traffic lights. It was a way of ease and luxury and money. Even yet there was a thrill in being of it. His desire remained that he might drive thus every evening to the quiet song of corded tires on asphalt.

Resurged forebodings when his motor, having left the Avenue at Fifty-seventh Street, followed a bus into clamorous Broadway, revealing to him the unseemly bustle of Columbus Circle. There he saw motorless men and women clogging the maw of the subway. Farther on he heard the vulgar clatter

of the elevated, found it impossible to fancy riding in those superannuated cars.

In the Drive there was no clatter. The river glimmered for him, bare at first and then through trees. The lights of Jersey twinkled like stars, and the wind blew sweet and clean across the Hudson.

The motor stopped. A footman touched cap and opened doors for him: the car door, first, and then the door into the foyer, warmly lighted, and softly whispering of money. Money and comfort. Ease.

Lucile was not at home. Out playing bridge somewhere, the maid reported. Madame would be home early though. Yes, certainly for dinner.

"Mr. Lewes—" he began, and then broke off. How stupid to forget and blurt out to the maid like that! But habit was strong. Every Wednesday evening—for three years, wasn't it?—Lewes had dined with them. To-night would break the custom which was to be no more. "We shall miss Mr. Lewes," he said apologetically to the maid.

The maid brought him an evening paper, and he held it before him as if he were reading; but after an indeterminate moment he tossed it upon the walnut table without a single impression of its contents. Then he got up and took a turn about the room; lighted a cigarette, and flung it almost untasted into the open fire; and finally went off to dress for dinner.

There was a scrawled note on his dressing table.

"Don't forget," Lucile had written, "that we are going to the Troyers' to-night."

He crumpled the note and tossed it on the floor while he stared at his own image in the mirror. Then he lifted a photograph of Lucile from the silver array of the dressing table, and looked at it as if she weren't his wife, but some stranger.

"I wonder if you really know her?" something whispered to him out of the silence.

Lucile came in immediately after he sat down in the living room before the fire. She stole up behind him and laid her cool cheek against his. Her lips were soft and warm and moist. And she looked unusually beautiful.

She went away to dress, and came back quickly in blue like the enameled sky, the color of her eyes; her arms and shoulders bare and white. She looked fragile and expensive. Her cheeks glowed red. Hal wondered if she rouged too much. He caught her to him, rubbed two fingers on a cheek, making twin white paths to which the blood rushed back in even color. Then he kissed the cheek.

Her high little breast suggested turbulence when she faced him across the dinner table. She drew in her breath, as if for freighted words. Something she wanted, doubtless. He must see the bank to-morrow. When her lips moved, though, she said only:

"We'll use your car to-night. I sent mine to the garage." And then, another time: "We mustn't miss the opera to-morrow. It's Jeritza's night."

But mostly she was silent. He watched her staring at the chair pushed back against the wall—the chair that Lewes had always sat in when he dined with them. When her eyes met Hal's, she lowered them, and said:

"It's hard to realize."

"Don't speak of it."

"I must," she answered. "Hal, Henry Lewes has willed me half a million dollars."

The room suddenly blurred for him, and the silence sounded like the whispering of many lips. Could it be true? It was. She looked at him, and her eyes, the color of the enameled sky, were clear and unwavering.

Half a million dollars!

They were late in arriving at the

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Troyers'. In the first place Hal had had to see the will, which, curiously enough, had been forwarded by Lewes' lawyers to Lucile that afternoon in its original and still sealed packet, with some other papers Hal hadn't time to read. The will proved simple and direct, and it was quite indubitable. It bore a recent date and Lewes' fine, plain signature. It named Lucile, set forth the testator's love and affection for her, then enumerated stocks and bonds in a trust company's safe, and parcels of real estate, estimating that the whole would bring on sale half a million dollars.

He had been about to read the papers, accompanying the will, when Lucile said: "We shall be unpardonably late;" and he had let her put the will and all back into the safe. What mere detail could matter in the face of facts so overwhelming?

Yes, they were late. But that made very little difference. The rich can do no wrong. And now, with Lewes' half a million, they would certainly be rich. The note, the branch in Detroit, the world he belonged to, with its properties of ease and luxury—all things would be made secure.

The room they entered gave him a sense of pleasure: gay, white-shouldered women, brilliantly attired; smell of tobacco, mingled with expensive scents; soft, laughing voices; friendly hails. Already people seemed to feel his new, or rather his confirmed, importance. Fowlkes, the young banker, prematurely gray, waved to him across the room. And Jimmy Troyer clapped him on the back and led him toward the dining room, whence came a pleasant swish.

Passing a cushioned alcove, however, Hal caught sight of Ducky Drake and heard the sibilance of Ducky's voice. Ducky was talking in a whisper to a blond divorcee, with high, arching eyebrows. When Ducky saw Hal, Ducky grinned, and Hal realized that he was scowling back.

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Hal told himself that he was wrong to scowl at Ducky, because Ducky was not worth a scowl—deserved none, really. And yet Hal stood in Jimmy's dining room gulping Jimmy's cocktail, trying to recall the empty words of Ducky's interview. Money — Lewes. Good heavens! Ducky couldn't know about the will, for no one knew. Lewes' lawyers didn't even know, Lucile had said, though why they shouldn't know did not appear. But, anyway, the packet had been sealed till Lucile opened it. Still, Ducky had said—money; Lewes; something about Lucile. It wasn't what he said, however. It was the unspoken whisper, vague and unintelligible. If Ducky had meant anything, he had meant only that Lucile was good to Lewes.

"Ducky is an awful ass," Hal said to Jimmy.

"Gad, yes," Jimmy answered. "Don't see how the women stand for him."

"What does he do?"

"Hanged if I know. Writes those cute blackmailing paragraphs for *Tatler*, some one told me. If I knew, I'd throw him out."

The evening did not go through with the delightful soothings it had promised. Hal lost heavily at bridge. The losses didn't matter in themselves, since money difficulties had been solved, but Hal was piqued at playing badly. His trouble seemed to be preoccupation. He kept thinking about Ducky's being there, about what an ass Ducky was, and what a villain, too, if Jimmy had heard right. And then, too, he had an unreasonable and quite inexplicable fear that Lucile would tell some one about the will. That was absurd. The will would have to go on record; every one would have to know about it. And why shouldn't it be known? One should be proud of having had a friend like Lewes.

Yet when the last rubber had been played Hal got up quickly, and immediately joined his wife. Most of the

tables were already broken up, and he spied her at the far end of the connecting library, sitting on a divan with Bob Wainwright, showing him a ring she wore: an antique jade. He was annoyed to see that Bob held her hand; then at himself for noticing.

"Think we'd better go," he said abruptly; and, when Bob moved off, he asked, under his breath: "You haven't mentioned Lewes' will?"

"No," said Lucile.

He was relieved at that, and on the way home tried to think out some way by which the will could be recorded without publicity. "Every single will doesn't get into the newspapers," he assured himself. Then again shame smote him. Why shouldn't it be known?

"Let me see the will again," he said when they sat down together in front of the fire, in their own apartment.

She worked the combination of the safe box and took out the packet in its envelope. She handed him a paper out of it. Hardly believable that he should hold in his hand so lightly half a million dollars. To test his sense of reality he crackled the paper before he began to read. Yes, there it was—the careful list of Lewes' possessions, Lucile's now, and Hal's: stocks and bonds in vault, parcels of real estate. All for Lucile's "love and affection," so the will had said quite plainly.

Somehow, he didn't wish to see that phrase again, and yet, fascinated, he looked for it. He thought he knew just where to find the line, but when his eye fell there, the phrase did not appear, and when he looked again the words seemed different. Was it a dream—that whole mad day—a changing dream? The will in which he couldn't find his wife's name. He tried to speak, to ask Lucile, but there came only a queer sound in his throat. He thrust the paper toward her. Against his wish, it rattled now.

She looked at the paper, then at him. "Oh, I gave you the wrong one," she

said. "We are to burn that one, if I'm to have the money. Henry wanted me to have it, but he fixed it so I needn't take it if I didn't want to; wrote another will, you see, in favor of that hospital up-State that he was always helping."

"You have both wills?"

"They are both here."

He breathed more easily. Yes, they were both here. He held them in his hand. Almost alike, the two wills. Both bore the same date, enumerated the same properties, were signed with the same firm hand. And yet how vital was the single difference: his wife's name on the one, not on the other. He held them both. He could drop one into the fire. The other would survive. His wife—the hospital.

"And no one knows of this?"

"No one but us."

It was queer of Lewes to leave two wills. Why had he put a choice before Lucile? Only there would be no choice between a fortune and nothing at all. Who would toss away half a million without reason? And what reason could there be? What moral issue? If there had been a moral issue, Lewes' leaving it to them would have appeared the devil's own contrivance.

"But why," said Hal aloud, "should Lewes have left two wills?"

Lucile, standing with her face half turned toward the fire, seemed to be flushed a deeper red than he had noticed.

"Can't you guess?" she said. Her eyes were wide and clear and blue. "He thought people might talk."

Hal laughed. His laugh sounded nervous and strained. The day had been very trying.

"But, good heavens, Lucile, no one would say a thing like that about you!"

She looked at him gravely a long time.

"Well, *you* wouldn't, dear," she said at last.

The fire crackled and the clock ticked and he sat there holding the two wills. A faint, fantastic echo flicked his ear, an echo that was sibilant and indistinguishable. At last he handed the two documents back to her. She put them back into the safe, and turned the knob. They would be silent there, and dark and impotent.

He dreamed about Ducky that night. Ducky came to see him at the office. Ducky had a pencil and a leer. He asked Hal questions, and Hal, with the point of his boot, kicked him out on the hard tile in the passage, and slammed the door.

Then morning and reality.

Ahead of him the office. There were no problems now of money. Yet he scarcely saw the misty river with the gray turrets of the battle fleet rising out of it like wraiths in basketry. He hardly heard the rattle and roar of the elevated as his car rolled under it. And at Columbus Circle he did not heed the crowds rushing for flying trains under the street. Fifth Avenue failed to touch his consciousness until he passed the office of the trust company where Lewes had stored his stocks and bonds. They were Lucile's now. And Hal's. No, just Lucile's. They were not Hal's. The will said nothing about Hal. Why hadn't it said anything? Love and affection for Lucile. Not Hal. A sickening wave beat upward against his throat. His head throbbed with the intense pain of it.

On his desk he found a note from his sales manager. "I have an offer from the Harfleur people," said the note, "and since there is some doubt about the Detroit branch, I think it best—"

Hal sat there fingering the note and frowning. There was no need to frown. He didn't have to lose his sales manager. He knew that to-day he could finance the Detroit branch. Well, why didn't he do something? Press a button on his desk, call in the sales manager, and say,

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"My best friend has left money to my wife. You needn't quit. You can have anything you want." Why didn't he? Why didn't he feel happy and carefree, as he had felt last night when he had reached the Troyers'? What was there that made things different?

He didn't call the salesmanager. He called the treasurer. He said:

"Look here. We're in a tight place. We need to expand. But to expand we'd have to have money. Now I think we'll not go in for any branches. Our biggest note is due, and I'm going to see the bank this morning. They will let it run. I know they will. I feel——"

The treasurer handed him a letter then.

"This just came," he said. "They say we must pay up in full."

Then Hal sitting in his office, staring. Then his going to the bank. And Fowlkes, the banker, prematurely gray, shaking his head at Hal and saying: "Hal, we have allowed you to renew this note three times. You've got to pay up now, or else——" And Fowlkes' shrug. "You have till two o'clock."

And after that three hours of begging elsewhere, sitting alone and thinking, scheming, groping. Two o'clock. Surrender. Telephoning Fowlkes. "Well, I can pay that note—in sixty days." The banker's hard laugh, and Hal's voice saying, "Oh, I have security." And his hand trembling while it wrote figures on a pad. Oh, he had security. A will. And Fowlkes' voice, now mollified: "Well, bring it down."

"To-morrow?"

"No, Hal. You don't seem to understand. This afternoon. I'm going to stay here."

"Yes. All right." Quite vaguely. Yes, all right. Fowlkes would have to see the will. Or else that hard laugh. And the end.

For some reason, for some absurd reason, he had not meant to use the will. But why shouldn't he? He needed money

and the will was as good as money. It was his—Lucile's. It was his right to use it. All he had to do was to let Fowlkes see it. Then he would file it with the court as Lucile meant him to. And after that, it *would* be money.

After Fowlkes had seen it! The same sickening wave beat up against his throat, and made his head throb. Fowlkes would have to know that Lewes had left money to Lucile. And then the court. Would everybody know? He might say to Fowlkes, "This is confidential, you know." But what about the court, the newspapers? Would they treat it as confidential? He could almost see the headline, "Wealthy Clubman"—and the rest. And even Fowlkes. He wondered if Fowlkes would smile at him, "Your wife, eh?"

There was the alternative. He might call Fowlkes now, say to him, "I shan't take up that note. Go on and close me out. Be damned to you!" And then go home and get Lewes' implicating will and burn it while there was yet time.

While there was yet time! That was ridiculous. It made him laugh. What did it mean? And why all this agony about a little business? As if there could be harm in good old Lewes' will! Who would think evil of Lucile—Hal's wife! It was so utterly absurd, so ridiculous!

He picked up the telephone receiver, called the garage. He got his hat and coat. He started home to get the will, the harmless, saving will. He had not reached the door of his office, however, when the boy brought in the card of Mr. Francis I. Drake.

Hal must have stood a long time staring at the card. The card was eloquent of last night's vague, shapeless impressions. Words rushed together—money, Lewes, Lucile—articulating like the joints of a dismembered snake.

It was not true. It wasn't! Hal's boot ached for the remembered impact of his dream. What calumny had

Ducky whispered? Blackmailer. Slanderer. Hal would go and kick him out on the hard tile of the passage. But no, Hal would not even see him. The very thought of seeing Ducky filled him with abhorrence. No. Hal would not touch him with his boot.

"What shall I tell him?" said the boy. Hal's lips framed words. Tell him to go—and write his paragraphs? The sickening wave again. A paragraph about Lucile? A vile, insinuating paragraph? Better not to anger Ducky. Better to see him, try to convince him, if he talked about Lucile, that he was wrong.

"Let him come in," said Hal.

He never knew what happened—all that happened. Ducky's sitting there. He knew that much. And talk. And Ducky's reference to money. Nothing about Lucile. And then the check. He sent and got the money. Yes, a thousand. He did manage it. And "Thanks," said Ducky.

Then Ducky was gone and Hal sat staring at the towers of Manhattan. It didn't matter. He was rich. His business was saved. Besides, his wife was innocent.

His wife was innocent. He made the words beat their insistence on his brain. His wife was innocent. And yet Ducky had guessed—guessed yesterday—about the will. Ducky had guessed the will. Ducky was right. Oh, not in his implications. They were unspeakably false. But right about the money. Hal would have money. How could Ducky be so right—and so despicably wrong?

Ducky had a thousand dollars that were Hal's. Ducky would never pay it back. But Ducky would keep quiet. What was a thousand dollars in half a million—and in all the millions Hal's business, now saved, would roll up? His wife was innocent, and no one would ever know. Fowlkes would never tell. The court, the newspapers—Well, Ducky would keep quiet.

His motor car was smart against the

curb. He got into it with confidence. The motor car was firmly his to-day. The note, the branch in Detroit, everything was settled. His business was sound. There would be motors always, streams of motors, glistening and flowing. He would always ride in motors. Up and down Fifth Avenue.

Fifth Avenue was golden, warm and yellow with the sun of the afternoon. Sun on crystal. Sun on bronze. Sun on the glittering stuff that spires are made of. Warmer than yesterday, when he had pulled his coat about him. Earlier and brighter. He thrilled to it. He was secure in it.

Forebodings came no more. The Avenue was his, although he did turn out of it at Fifty-seventh Street. The clamor of Broadway and the unseemly bustle of Columbus Circle concerned him not at all. They were apart from him, remote even when he passed them in his motor. The subway threatened him no longer. It was a way downtown when there should be snow, and corded tires slip dangerously above hidden asphalt. Even the clatter of the elevated, farther on, sounded far off, remote.

On the Hudson, more sun. Floods of it. The river multiplied it. His. He owned a bit of it, some of the sun, some of the river. He could live always where he could see the river and the sun. Lewes' money, because of Lucile's goodness to Lewes, bought Hal a place beside the river, in the sun. He waited for the hot wave to surge up against his throat. It came more slowly this time. Not so hot. His wife was innocent, and he was rich.

Home. He told the chauffeur to wait. He had but to get the will, and take it down to Fowlkes.

"Madame is not at home," the maid said.

He was conscious of annoyance, and, at the same time, of unreason at expecting his wife to be at home at all hours.

He had not come home to see her. He had not told her that he was coming. He had come to get the will, and that was all.

He went into the living room where the wall safe was, and stood stupidly in front of it. His mind seemed struggling toward some troublesome detail. He couldn't think. But why should he want to think? He came only to get the will. He must open the safe.

But he couldn't open it.

The thought formed slowly: "I can't open it. I don't know how. I never kept anything in there. It's Lucile's safe. She knows how to open it. I don't."

The thought first, and then the meaning of it. Fowlkes waiting downtown to see the will. The will locked there. Lucile—where was Lucile?

Where was his wife? The maid said, shopping. "Can you get her on the telephone?" he asked. The maid would try. She tried. She couldn't get her. Lucile would be home for dinner. But meantime the bank—Fowlkes sitting there and thrumming with his fingers on his desk. Getting impatient. Harder. More impatient.

Hal spun the knob. He spun and spun. The knob turned easily. In oil. He pulled. The door was fast.

He paced the room. He felt in his pockets for a cigarette. None there. None in the humidor. He rang for the maid.

"No cigarettes?" he asked when she appeared.

"I'll see."

There were no cigarettes. He sat down waiting, drumming on his chair. Hal waiting uptown for Lucile. Fowlkes waiting downtown for Hal.

The room was getting cold. He had the maid put on a log. She went out again and then came back, bringing a smoker's stand. Cigars. He lighted one. Where did it come from? It wasn't his. He found it vastly satisfying. But it

wasn't his. It had a reminiscent fragrance, though.

"That box was Mr. Lewes'," the maid said.

The old, hot wave again, but feebler this time. Not so hot. He filled his lungs with cool, sweet smoke. Motors, and a window on the Hudson, and a crackling fire, and Lewes' cigars. Because his wife was good to Lewes, had Lewes to dinner every Wednesday, stayed with him the day he died. Just suppose she hadn't! There. He wouldn't think of it. Why think of ruin when salvation lay in the dark security of yonder vault?

The doorbell rang. His heart pounded. No. Not Lucile. It was Helen Troyer asking for Lucile. She just dropped in. She wouldn't stop. Another wait, and then the door again.

*It was Lucile.*

She gave a little *cry* when she came in. It sounded glad, surprised—how else? She came and kissed him with her warm, moist lips.

She took off her wrap. Her throat showed bare. Her arms were thinly covered. Her high little breasts showed curves and delicate mobility under the sheer material of which her dress was made. She took off her hat, and her coiled hair caught flame, and her eyes shone blue like the enameled sky.

"You're home early," said Lucile.

She looked at him queerly. Did she read his face? He wondered what his face looked like. There was no time for wondering, though. For there was Fowlkes downtown, drumming on his desk and waiting for the will, and here was Lucile, come to turn the knob of that little box, hand him the envelope, Lewes' will.

"Yes," he said.

His throat was dry and hot. He must say something else, too. He must get the will out of that box; ask her to give it to him.

But, without his asking, she opened

the safe. She had a package, a slender, silk-covered box. Something she was going to put in the safe. Her sure fingers swung the door out. He saw inside the familiar envelope. The will. It was still there. He heard his own sigh, long, contented. Everything was as it should be.

"I bought this," said his wife's voice. "Look."

But he didn't look. There was no time for that now, although there was no hurry, either. The day's struggle and stress were over. There was what he came for, in yonder envelope.

Calm possessed him as he strode over to the safe. He seemed actually rested. The gray walls with the firelight playing on them; the deep rugs his feet sank in; the mellow shine of old walnut—all the habiliments of that comfortable room seemed suddenly to soothe him.

Yes, there was the envelope. It came smoothly out, lay thick in his palm. He opened it deliberately. There were the two wills: one for the orphans, one for Lucile. He chose the right one carefully.

"Well, don't you like my necklace?" said Lucile.

He could look now. She was standing before the high old pier glass that had come from France. She was looking at herself. The slender, silken box lay on the floor at her feet, and there was a rope of emeralds about her throat.

Emeralds. A rope of them. His wife had bought them. She would pay for them with Lewes' money. Came the whisper in his ears. It was clear now, one clear word, no longer vague, no longer far away, but loud, insistent, and reiterant. It was a dreadful word. His wife.

He stood quite near her. He must have moved toward her. His back was to the fire. The room was darker, and on the gray wall in front of him he saw his own fantastic shadow, big and looming. His wife was in the shadow. But

the necklace caught light from somewhere, gleamed and glittered and shone brilliantly.

He caught the necklace, twisting it. The emeralds had smooth surfaces and sharp points. They were fastened by a strong catch, for he pulled and twisted till Lucile's face showed pain, yet it did not give.

"What is it, Hal?"

She pulled from him; and the catch broke, another joint in the chain as well, for the linked emeralds went falling on the hard floor bouncing and clinking like thin hail.

She stood looking at him with her eyes round, and a puzzled look in them as if she didn't understand, as if she couldn't hear the whisper he heard. She was pretending innocence, surprise. Well, he would make her hear. He shook his hands at her. He saw the shadows that his hands made on the wall; the will in one hand, a fragment of the broken necklace in the other.

Then he spoke the word—the word of one round syllable. He meant to make the room loud with it. But it was only a whisper when it came, a scarcely breathed whisper.

The rest was quickly over. There was the moment when his hands menaced her, and the hands of the titan shadow shook over her, too. The whisper still fluttered and hung in the calm, gray room. Its echoing waves were more visible than audible. Hal saw them strike her ear, break over her face, suffuse her eyes, and part her lips in a cry of horror.

He felt the paper twitched from his hand and, turning, saw her run with it, fling it. Then he saw it on the fire. He saw a fortune shrivel black. He saw the notary's seal rise in white embossing and crumble to ash. He even heard the ghostly sigh as a fragment of Lewes' will fluttered off up the chimney. But all these minute perceptions were dim and unimportant.

All that mattered was Lucile quivering under that still echoing whisper of his, her eyes drenched with horror. Lucile. His wife. Lucile, whose eyes should be as clear as the enameled sky. What had he done to her? How could he undo it?

Was there a magic word? I was a fool. Forgive me. He wanted to shout down the dreadful whisper that he knew was false. Lucile! But when he tried to speak her name his throat clogged, and a sob wrenches him.



THE history of wall papers is a fascinating study for those who are interested in the subject, for fashions in wall paper change as do other fashions. Far different from the plain, neutral-toned papers that have been in vogue for the past generation are the gay eighteenth and early nineteenth century landscape papers with their beautiful backgrounds of trees and flowers and birds. Many of the latter are made in France from the original wood blocks of Napoleon's time.



THE famous Devonshire pearls, which are the property of the Duchess of Devonshire, the wife of England's colonial secretary, were collected one by one by the Duke of Devonshire, and the string is valued by experts at one million dollars.



### SPRING GARDEN

THE garden hyacinths are out,  
The little, vivid, loopy flowers,  
Like long blue bubbles spouted up  
From the green wake of April showers.

I saw them as I raked the leaves,  
And swift I flung across and knelt,  
And broke a gemmy blossom off  
And fastened it within my belt.

And suddenly there chimed in me  
The lushy, soft, tumultuous tune,  
Of youth and spring and meeting eyes,  
Dancing and kisses and the moon.

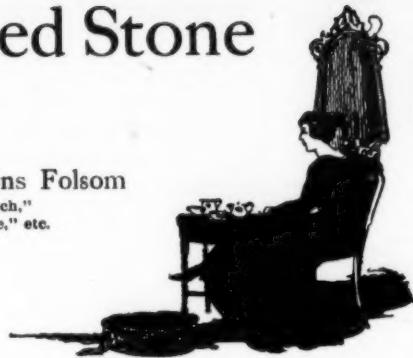
It sang like waters in a wood,  
All meltingly and cooling sweet;  
My heart grew full of little blooms  
Like the old garden at my feet.

CHRISTINE TURNER CURTIS.

# An Unturned Stone

By Elizabeth Irons Folsom

Author of "Pitch,"  
"In the Audience," etc.



IT was impossible to face that horrible old man and feel sympathy.

He turned his head painfully on his bandaged neck. On the side toward me blue powder burns specked his ear and head; drawn grooves of healing flesh showed above his bandage.

"My first day out," he snarled. "Four weeks and nothing done! Can a man be shot down in his own house and no one arrested for it? Seems he can. I hired you because the prosecuting attorney wasn't doing anything. His business. The State should protect a law-abiding citizen. I am paying you, young man, over the head of the prosecuting attorney, and I'll pay well, to show that no man can shoot me and get away with it. Got anything to report?"

"I have gone carefully over your list of suggestions."

"Oh, you have."

"I find no hint in your business wrangles. Your quarrels are not vital enough to precede a crime, especially as in every case the other side was getting the best of it. No man tries to kill when he is winning."

He shifted in his chair and scowled.

"Go on."

"There is nothing in your business life to suggest what happened. In your private life, Mr. Holt, the name of Miss Chloe Ridge presents itself."

"She didn't do it. She'd be a fool to try to kill me."

He raised his long upper lip in a meaning hint. His old face flushed; it had odd lines always ready to leer, and they crept gloatingly into their usual place; a telltale vein showed itself in his temple.

"You were not breaking off your acquaintance with Miss Ridge?"

"No-o. We quarrel sometimes."

"You had dined at her apartment that night?"

"Sh-h-h," he flung at me sharply and I looked up.

Across the big room adjoining the one where we sat Maida Holt was coming slowly toward us. Her slimness was outlined against the dark bookcases; her white dress clung about her; a little green book was tucked under her arm. She was always prettier than the last time. I could not look away. She stopped close and my heart sped. The old man's daughter was cut from other cloth.

"Anything?" she asked.

"You'll know it when there is," he answered irritably.

Fingers swept the outside panels of the door. He beat the arm of his chair.

"In God's name, come in, if you must, but don't fumble with that knob!"

The door opened and Mrs. Holt entered. She was still a beautiful woman,

her figure straight, her skin clear, her nearly white hair banded like a coronet. Her eyes were strange, unfocused, seeking.

"Must the whole family come into my conferences with my attorney?" he demanded.

"We are anxious, Herbert."

"Well, be anxious outside. I'll be obliged if you'll get out."

Maida Holt put her arm instantly about her mother. The girl was tall and her chin lay against the gray coronet; one hand patted the shoulder under it. I saw her other hand against the green book; it's soft leather was dented by the pressure of her fingers.

Then she laughed and lifted her head gayly.

"Isn't he cross, mother! But I think we would be, too. Never you mind, father, we'll be back when you are in a better humor."

She smiled at me. Did she flush? Did she know how I felt about her? The smile went on to him. How could it! She could not have found anything to excuse in his manner.

When the door closed I said:

"You were sitting here, Mr. Holt. Can you recall anything more than you have already told me?"

"No." He crossed his thin legs and leaned forward. "I had just come in and sat down here to look at the newspaper. My wife went upstairs. Maida was away. There was no one else in the house. I didn't hear a damn thing until the shot came. It struck my shoulder and I swung around. Then the second caught me under the ear, a quarter inch from ending me. I fell to the floor. Not a sound. Whoever it was came in through the window there, from the garden. He couldn't have come the other way, or I would have seen him."

I knew the story, but sometimes new things came out in the retelling of an old tale.

"And in four weeks they have found nothing. Talked robbery, insanity, mistaken identity—God knows what! Talked everything and done nothing. You'd think they all approved of it."

"Your wife knew of your acquaintance with Miss Ridge?"

"Um-n-m—some of it."

He laughed, a sharp little cackle.

"Oh, you needn't try to put it on Sally. She's no spunk. All she can do is to cry." He leaned back and winked at me. "It's funny how a woman thinks tears will set things going her way. She thinks you'll turn in your tracks, if you're wet up. A woman can make an awful fuss."

"She left you a while, didn't she?"

"What's that got to do with the shooting? If you're thinking of Sally, you're wrong. She couldn't hit a barn door. She's losing her sight. The old lady's damn near blind, though she tries not to show it."

He settled back, crossed his legs, and set to swinging one polished, white-spotted shoe. The man radiated slime. His drab, spatulate finger tips joined together had long, broad nails, more horrid for their shining care.

"Oh, no, it wasn't Sally. She's sentimental over me. First love, early life together and all that. Graves of the children and struggles with poverty are Sally's line. I can make her cry any time."

"Can you?"

"Yes. She's all romance. I'm not, you see."

"I see."

He leaned over confidentially.

"Between us, a man gets tired of a sentimental, weeping woman. And going blind, too. What will I do with a blind wife? Nuisance! As I first thought about who had done this thing, I didn't care if it was laid on Chloe, to sort of force Sally's hand with the scandal. But now, by God, I want to get back at whoever it was. He's got

to pay for it! You're a slow lot, you lawyers."

I watched him. He didn't know that I had the clew when I came in; that I was wondering what to do with it. He didn't know where I got it. From the history? From the act itself? No. From a modern Russian writer's fiction.

I had stumbled across it, reading to pass a nervous midnight hour. I had stared at the printed page aghast. The situation, characters, reason—the act set plain before me. I had thought of it, but dismissed the thought as impossible. But that Russian writer had not thought it impossible. And he showed it to me: just where, why, and by what means it was done. Its psychology lay spread out before me. I watched him.

"Well, get on as fast as you can. I'll take a walk while the sun's out."

Light steps crossed the other room again. It was Maida Holt, calm, head up, her little green book just under her heart, as if it were her friend, her champion. She came so close that I could see the lettering: short stories by a modern Russian writer.

Instantly I followed her mind; knew

that she had been tortured, crucified by her mother's suffering. That, in reading the Russian's story, she had found just such a situation, the same cruelty to some one beloved, punishment meted by a daughter who had seen a mother racked and who chose a desperate act to end it, who fired a shot to make a loved one safe. She had acted as the story had shown the way. Then she had carried the book with her, supported by it. It was her salvation, her strength to bear. She had looked at me across the little green book that had directed her, with a strong, straight gaze that said: "I found the way here to save her, and I could do nothing else."

"Find him. Leave no stone unturned," he had said.

"Just one stone unturned," I said to her. "Let me hold it down for you."

And I gathered her close. She cried and I soothed her. I took the book away and said, "I am the shield now. I stand between you and suffering. No one will ever guess the secret."

And no one ever will, now. It's past. She must never speak of it; she shall never think of it, if I can help it.

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**Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1923.**

State of New York, County of New York, (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication, for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443 Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Helen L. Lieder, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Ainslee's Magazine Company, Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street, New York, N. Y., a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York,

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: Clarence C. Vernon, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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ORMOND G. SMITH, President,  
of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.  
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of March, 1923. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public, No. 205, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1923.)



# In Broadway Playhouses

By  
Dorothy Parker

## Oh, Pretty Well

**S**OME day, when I have made a few million dollars—I figure, by the way things are running along now, I ought to have it all piled up somewhere around the late spring of 2651—I am going to divide the money into two nice, equal parts, and take half of it down to the people who run the Theater Guild, telling them to go out and buy themselves some little thing to remember me by. "No, no, not a word," I shall say to them. "It's little enough for me to do, after all the pleasure you've given me." It may be that I shall recall, shortly after the presentation ceremonies, "John Hawthorne," and "Peer Gynt," and "The Tidings Brought to Mary," and shall return and ask for about four hundred and seventy-five dollars back. But it is to be hoped that my better nature will prevail. For, after all, the Theater Guild has almost always treated me white.

The Guild's latest presentation, at the time of writing, is "The Adding Machine," by Elmer L. Rice, who started the fashion in those mystery plays in which the second act is supposed to take place some time before the first, thus giving the audience a chance to get right in on the inside as to how the crime really occurred. In "The Adding Machine," however, he has entirely abandoned his former manner. His latest play is—well, I couldn't tell you off-hand whether it is expressionistic, or

impressionistic. In fact, if you were to get me off in a corner and say to me, "Tell me, my dear, just what is the difference between an expressionistic drama and an impressionistic one?" I could only droop my head and murmur: "I don't know."

"The Adding Machine" tells, in sweeps and flashes, the story of a clerk. For twenty-five years he has been sitting at his high desk, copying down figures and figures and figures, going home night after night to the shrill naggings of his wife. Then on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his employment with his firm, the boss tells him that he is discharged; they are to install an adding machine to do his work. The stage grows black, there is a noise of drums like the pounding of blood in a crazed man's head, the figures of the boss and the clerk revolve madly—well, perhaps not quite so madly as the author had in mind, but then these revolving stages are always a trifle sedate—a nightmare of numbers is flashed on the walls, there are two great splashes of red, and you know that the clerk has killed his employer.

You follow *Mr. Zero*, the clerk, then, through the nightmare party his wife gives that same evening, in the midst of which he is arrested; hear him pronounced guilty, in court, by a nightmare jury composed of his wife's guests; see him rise from his grave,

dressed in his funeral dress suit, in a strikingly set, but, unfortunately, dull graveyard scene. From there he wanders to the Elysian Fields, where he meets the woman who has killed herself for love of him, and where he removes his burial shoes luxuriously, and, out of gladness of heart indulges with her in an awkward but sincere dance, to the strains of a celestial fox-trot. It is then, when he is just embarked on the one good time he has ever known in life or death, that he learns that, in the Elysian Fields, people don't bother with the formality of getting married. His respectability outraged, he gathers up his shoes, turns his back on the woman, and leaves the place, bristling with virtue.

You see him, finally, in a high, airy heaven, fussing happily with the keys of a mammoth adding machine, which he leaves whiningly when a nonchalant keeper, wearing soiled overalls and smoking a pipe, strolls in with the message that he must return to earth for another in his succession of lives. The last you see of him, he is running off, waving excitedly to an imaginary young lady named *Hope*, who, he believes, is to accompany him on his next little trip through life. And that is the end of the story of *Mr. Zero*'s life and death.

There are moments when you think hard about "Liliom;" there are other moments when you have vague memories of "The Hairy Ape;" the courtroom scene, with *Mr. Zero*'s long plea, is most awfully tiresome, and the graveyard is but little better; even the Elysian Fields episode gets pretty tedious. But the impression you take away from "The Adding Machine" is of a fine play, and an important one, and you doubt whether you will ever see anything much more skilfully written and presented than its first three scenes.

The play is, of course, finely set, for Lee Simonson did that part of it, and,

like all Theater Guild productions, it is well and intelligently acted. Dudley Digges is an utterly convincing *Mr. Zero*; only in moments of stress, when he loses his conscientious Bronx accent, and says something like, "I t'ought me old woman might pahss out," do you realize that he is, after all, a very good actor, and not a whining clerk. Margaret Wycherly is gentle and pathetic as the woman who works across the desk from *Zero*, and who can't go on living after he is dead. Even Helen Westley, whose appearance in every play offered by the Guild can only be ascribed to her desire to hold the franchise, gets into the spirit of the thing and gives an amazingly fine performance as the nagging wife.

Only the audience was hopelessly miscast. All the happy little ones present, on the night that we attended, were of that large and ever-increasing family that simply don't know how they would ever get along without their sense of humor. They knew what was funny; you couldn't fool them. Beds are funny, and women in the process of undressing are funny; so they giggled happily all through the scene in which the wife, while getting ready for the night, shrilly torments her husband, who is lying in bed. And from there on, they got it into their little curly heads that it was an hilarious comedy, and they began looking for humor in everything. And they were just the boys and girls who could have found it in a white hearse. When the tired bookkeeper droned drearily that she wished she was dead, they almost split their sides. I wish to Heaven they had.

After "The Adding Machine," the other plays of the month have a rather tapioca-like quality, yet one can, by searching diligently, find quite a vocabulary of kind words for them. There is, for instance, "The Enchanted Cottage." It isn't really what you could call the play perfect; sometimes, indeed, you rather

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get to thinking of it as the play poisonous. Even at its best, you are conscious that it always just misses what it is after. Yet you leave the theater sweet and kind and tender, resolved to be nice to all the little growing things, and, in the future, to be more courteous around the house.

Sir Arthur Wing Pinero apparently had his hat freshly ironed, told Geaves to lay him out something not too formal—something suitable to go a-romancing in—settled his gardenia in his button-hole, and sauntered down to the tailor's to try on one of those mantles of Barrie that so many of the young writing set have been seen around town in. The mantle is perhaps a little tricky in cut, and it does have a way of flying open and showing the impeccably tailored afternoon apparel beneath; but it isn't, on the whole, unbecoming to Sir Arthur.

In "The Enchanted Cottage," he uses as the foundation for his play—which, by the way, he doesn't call a play at all, but modestly bills as a fable—the idea that those who love are beautiful in each other's eyes. It isn't really the initial appearance in the world of that conceit, but it is none the less a lovely idea.

Unhappily, there is much, also, that may be lumped together under the simple heading of "something awful." This will cover all the comedy, the dream episode at the end of the second act, and the acting of the gentleman who plays the hero's stepfather.

"The Love Habit" presents the unique spectacle on the American stage of a French farce which has been translated, and then let alone. There has been no attempt made to clean it up, so that it will not outrage the sensibilities of the Broadway butterflies and heavy sugar daddies in the audience. There is no introduction of the dear little girl of the alleys who goes to live, just as a little sister, with the notorious rounder, and at the end of a year with him is

about to become his bride, still believing that babies come in the doctor's little black bag; nor yet of the dashing bachelor who is interested in his best friend's wife because he likes to hear her recite. "The Love Habit"—in the original, it is called "Pour Avoir Adrienne," which may be loosely translated as "Try and Get Adrienne"—has been left strictly as is by Gladys Unger, its translator.

Yet, though the smear of the Gallic soil is still thick on the farce, it remains just one of those things. It matters surprisingly little, it turns out, whether the characters' intentions are honorable, or as our French cousins so graphically put it, at the contrary. "Ah," we have been going about saying, with that little Continental air of ours, "if they'd only leave us the tang of these delicious French farces, and not spoil them by trying to make them proper, then what a good time we should have! But the morals being left free and wild really makes a scarcely perceptible difference. "The Love Habit" is just a pretty fairly amusing farce; with everybody rushing about and talking fast. If you like that sort of thing, it's perfectly corking; and, if you don't like it, why, it's all right for those that do. It is well acted, especially by Dwight Frye, Florence Eldridge, and Ernest Cossart. James Rennie, as always, is skillful and engaging; but he impresses one as being approximately as Gallic as William Jennings Bryan.

Another little sparkler is "Morphia," in which Lowell Sherman has the time of his life as the drug-addict hero. My, how that hero does like his morphine of an evening; he just can't bear to let it out of his sight. But he is saved by the intervention of a beautiful girl, imperfectly disguised as an actress. The young man, who has been in the habit of taking, every three-quarters of an hour, a shot strong enough to sink the *Aquitania*, is cured by the simple method

of being entirely deprived of his drug. He has rather a thin time during the night, but in the morning he is as good as new, and you gather that from then on he will always be able to take it or let it alone.

Mr. Sherman gets the utmost out of the addict's spell of longing for his dose of morphine. So whole-heartedly does he throw himself into the rôle that sensitive members of the audience presently begin to grimace and jerk in unison with him. After a while—look out for this one, it's going to be a nifty—you can't tell twitch is twitch. (Laughter and shouts of "Go on!").

Two things made "The Dice of the Gods," another play about drugs, seem much better than it had any real right to seem. One was that "Morphia" had come first, and once you had seen "Morphia," nothing seemed so very terrible to you. And the other was that Mrs. Fiske was present in the cast. Many a worse play has seemed glamorous and absorbing because of Mrs. Fiske's presence in the cast. Not much worse ones, it is true, but still, definitely worse.

Mrs. Fiske is the first stage drug-addict these eyes have ever beheld who did not twitch and jump and shiver and behave generally rather like John Barrymore in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." She merely becomes rather brighter and more caustic, after the supposed use of the needle. Indeed, when you observe the difference between her and the people in the play who never touched a grain in their lives, "The Dice of the Gods" becomes a powerful argument for the use of drugs.

As for the musical productions, you needn't telegraph for the folks back home to hurry on here because of those that have recently been produced. "Jack and Jill" has everything that a musical show should have: John Murray Anderson as its producer, beautiful girls, charming scenery, exquisite costumes,

Ann Pennington's legs—everything in short, but a diverting book, distinctive music, good comedians, and one or two jokes. The piece is always delightful to look at—but, if you come down to that, so is an expertly made coconut layer cake. And "Jack and Jill" is just about that entertaining.

They tell me that, since "Jack and Jill" started off, the producers rather caught the idea that things were not quite so cheery as they should have been. So what did they do but go out and sign up Miss Lulu McConnell to come over and get the customers laughing. "Wait till you see," enthusiasts say to me, "now that Lulu McConnell's in it, it will be as funny as anything." "Yeah?" is the *bon mot* with which I habitually greet their outbursts.

Speaking of funny women, as we just were at the Vanderbilt Theater, there is a highly welcome addition to the pitifully thin ranks. If you were to ask me—and here I am, in that impulsive way of mine, just going ahead and taking it for granted that you have—to recite for you the names of the funny women that I have seen in musical comedy or revue during my life, I should reply in a grand total of six words: "Fanny Brice, Irene Franklin, Beatrice Herford." And pressed, I might add, "Adele Astaire, if they ever let her have half a chance." That is, I should have before I had seen "Elsie."

Now truth and joy compel me to add another name to this list of these prides of the sex. That name is Luella Gears. Her method is quiet to the verge of inertia, she isn't much of a dancer, and as a singer she is somewhere well in Class D. And she is one of the greatest living comediennes. I'm sorry if it sounds dogmatic, but you've got to let yourself go once in a while.

But Miss Gear really ought to be in something other than "Elsie." The very least she deserves is a pretty good show.

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## Talks With Ainslee's Readers

■ **S**OME one, hearing just the title of Izola Forrester's latest novelette, asked eagerly: "But where is the 'temperamental zone?'" To which Miss Forrester replied, with customary originality: "It's a state of mind." A remarkable thesis on which to base a story, you say? Well, it's a remarkable story. The publication of a novelette by this popular author has come to mean an extra burden to the mails, for immediately upon the appearance of the magazine on the stands we are showered with appreciative letters from our readers asking, like Oliver Twist, "for more." And, though habitually averse to extravagant statement, we are nevertheless willing to go on record as regarding this latest novelette of Miss Forrester's as the best she has yet done. After reading the enthusiastic comment of readers on this author's last AINSLEE's novelette, "The White Moth," we were convinced that the story was unsurpassable. But knowing Miss Forrester, we wondered. And presently she offered the tangible evidence of her limitless writing skill, the manuscript of "The Temperamental Zone." And in the July number we shall hand it on to you, the most entertaining novelette it will be your privilege to read until—the August number appears.

■ **T**HE problem of the young and charming daughter of divorced parents is always an interesting one. In the case of Barbara Welling she had lived during most of her childhood in Europe with her charming and irresponsible mother, surrounded by the types of social dilettantes who are wont to gather about just such an exotic beauty as her mother was. And then one day the too-ardent wooing of one of her mother's followers, Czarny, a young Hungarian musician, precipitated her decision to cut loose from the anomalous position in which she found herself. Opportunely her mother announced that she had decided to have her go for a visit to her father in America. Unaware of the scheming of the older woman in sending

her, Barbara accepts joyously the proffered freedom. And when she arrives in America she finds a wholly unexpected situation. And that is the intriguing outset of a thoroughly unique story. Watch for "The Temperamental Zone."

■ **A**ND meanwhile the difficulties of Mimi Shelton, Johnny van Dusen, and Sophy Milliken in their quest for the elusive "whirligig," are shaping themselves toward a climax for your entertainment. The third installment of Henry C. Rowland's absorbing serial, "The Whirligig," will appear also in the July number. Such are Doctor Rowland's powers as a story-teller that as one reader told us: "I feel already that it is my invention that is at stake, my fortune which hangs in the balance. Please hurry up and give us the outcome of this thrilling tale." We're hurrying, sir, and herewith we offer you the promise of more to come.

■ **A**MAZING things are said to have been achieved in the solving of mystery and crime by the aid of the occult. Some of us are among those yet to be convinced of the efficacy of this method. But Drusilla Carstairs, charming little parlor plunderer of the unethical élite, in the next tale of Winston Bouv's remarkable series, "The Plunderers," uses this amazing method of uncovering guilt. And the astounding thing about it is that it works. But never for once, if the truth be told, did the bewitching little sleuth actually let herself slip over the borderland of the wholly conscious. Her campaign was, as usual, well plotted. And, as usual, she won. Read "The Crystal Gazers" in the next, the July AINSLEE's.

■ **Y**OU will find also in the next entertaining number short stories by Beatrice Ravelle, Nancy Cabell, Frances O. J. Gaither, and others, as well as Dorothy Parker's effervescent review of current plays, "In Broadway Playhouses."



# Mighty Like a Rose

Every baby is mighty like a rose in looks and sweetness to its mother. But the fact that 200,000 babies die every year in the United States before reaching their first birthday proves that thousands of mothers fail to realize how like a rose a baby is in its frail hold on life.

## The most dangerous business in the world—

the most hazardous occupation, is the business of being a baby.

Figures show that the reckless taxi driver has a better chance to live a year than has the new born baby to survive one day.

## Of the Seven Ages of Man—

the first age, the "baby in its nurse's arms", is the most dangerous. 35,000 die on the day on which they are born. 100,000 of them die before they are one month old.

The hideous picture of the Ammonite god Moloch into whose fiery

arms and bosom ignorant, superstitious mothers of old threw thousands upon thousands of babies as a sacrifice, fills the mind with sickening horror.

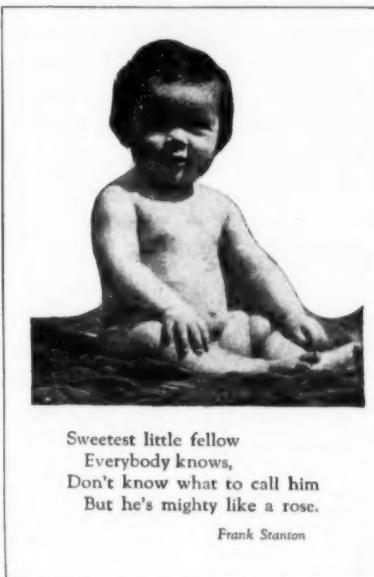
Yet today, through ignorance and neglect, the horrible sacrifice of babies is still going on, while parents and communities blame the deaths on Providence and hot weather.

"If all the babies born in New York City in one year were placed shoulder to shoulder they would make a line twenty-two miles long," according to U. S. Senator Copeland,

former Health Commissioner of New York City, and

## "Five Miles of Babies—

"died in the first year of life in 1891. In that year the great fight to save babies was started. Welfare stations were established where mothers could go for advice and where their babies were given thorough physical exami-



Sweetest little fellow  
Everybody knows,  
Don't know what to call him  
But he's mighty like a rose.

Frank Stanton

nations. Pasteurized milk was the next baby life-saving step.

"The result of teaching mothers how to care for their babies and of providing pure milk has reduced the death rate in New York City from 241 to 72 per thousand.

"But we may still refer to the deaths of infants as the Slaughter of the Innocents—for the work done in New York City but proves that thousands upon thousands of baby deaths can be prevented throughout the United States when every mother is taught that:

### **"Babies do not die because the weather is hot—**

"Babies do not die because it is dry or because it rains. Babies die in the summertime because they are

not properly fed and not properly taken care of."

### **Save the new born babies—**

by teaching the mother to safeguard her own health before the coming of the baby. Thousands of the 35,000 babies who now die on their natal day will then be saved, and one-half of the 100,000 who die before they are one month old will be saved when mothers take care of themselves and make proper arrangements for the coming of their little ones.

Observance of the rules of hygiene, proper feeding, proper bathing, proper clothing will save thousands of runabout baby lives this summer if the work of saving them is only begun in time.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company issues a booklet which has helped to save many, many baby lives. It may save your baby's life this summer. The booklet is called "The Child." It tells of the care of the baby—its feeding—the care of the milk and what to do the minute a baby shows digestive disturbances—the cause of most baby deaths in summer.

The care of the runabout child is also fully covered. The bogey of the Second Summer is banished and the belief that teething is a sickness is proved to be merely an old-fashioned superstition.

The booklet tells the Mother how to care for the baby's food—to remember the three C's—Clean, Cool, Covered.

The booklet was prepared for use of Metropolitan Policyholders but whether or not you are a policyholder if there is a baby in your family and you want to know how best to see it through this summer, write the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York City, and ask for a copy of "The Child." It will be mailed free of charge and without obligation on your part.

HALEY FISKE, President

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combed into the hair and almost immediately you can see "listless locks" begin to take on new life, new lustre, new silky sheen—stray ends and straggly strands melding into glorious waves and curls.

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But perseverance has finally brought a reward greater than I had ever dared hope for. We have at last compounded a curling fluid which not only curls the straightest head of hair, but beautifies it, too. A marvelous hair and scalp tonic which increases the growth and "life" of the hair as it curls and waves *adding* new silkiness, new softness, new thickness and beauty.

It is a colorless fluid compounded from the purest herbs of Southern Spain—a delicate elixir which makes any head of hair naturally curly and wavy—a delightful hair balsam which, when combed into the hair or used with your favorite curlers or curling iron, creates the prettiest and most natural-looking marcelle you ever saw.

I have never known another liquid of such magic potency. Even after a shampoo, when the hair is often stubbornly straight and unruly, it performs the miracle of making the hair behave—making it obey the commands of comb or curling iron—staying put where you want it—besides producing immediate and captivating curls, ringlets and water-waves.

No matter whether your hair is long, short or bobbed; whether dry or oily; blonde or brunette, Liquid Marcelle will solve your curling and hairdressing problems.

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(ONLY ONE TO A FAMILY)

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*Wavy Bob*

*Mr. Ryerson*

Chief Chemist

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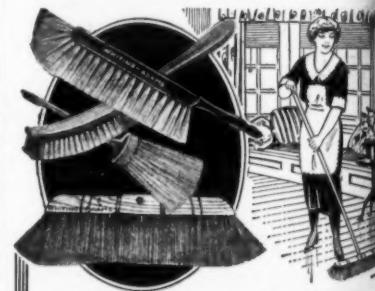
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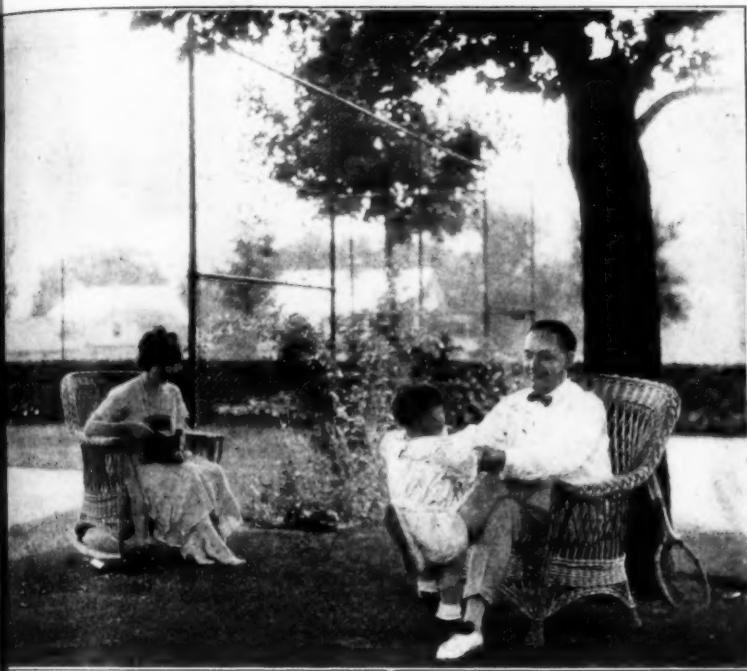
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